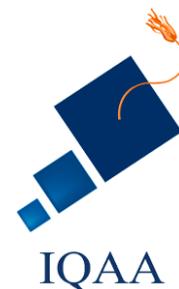


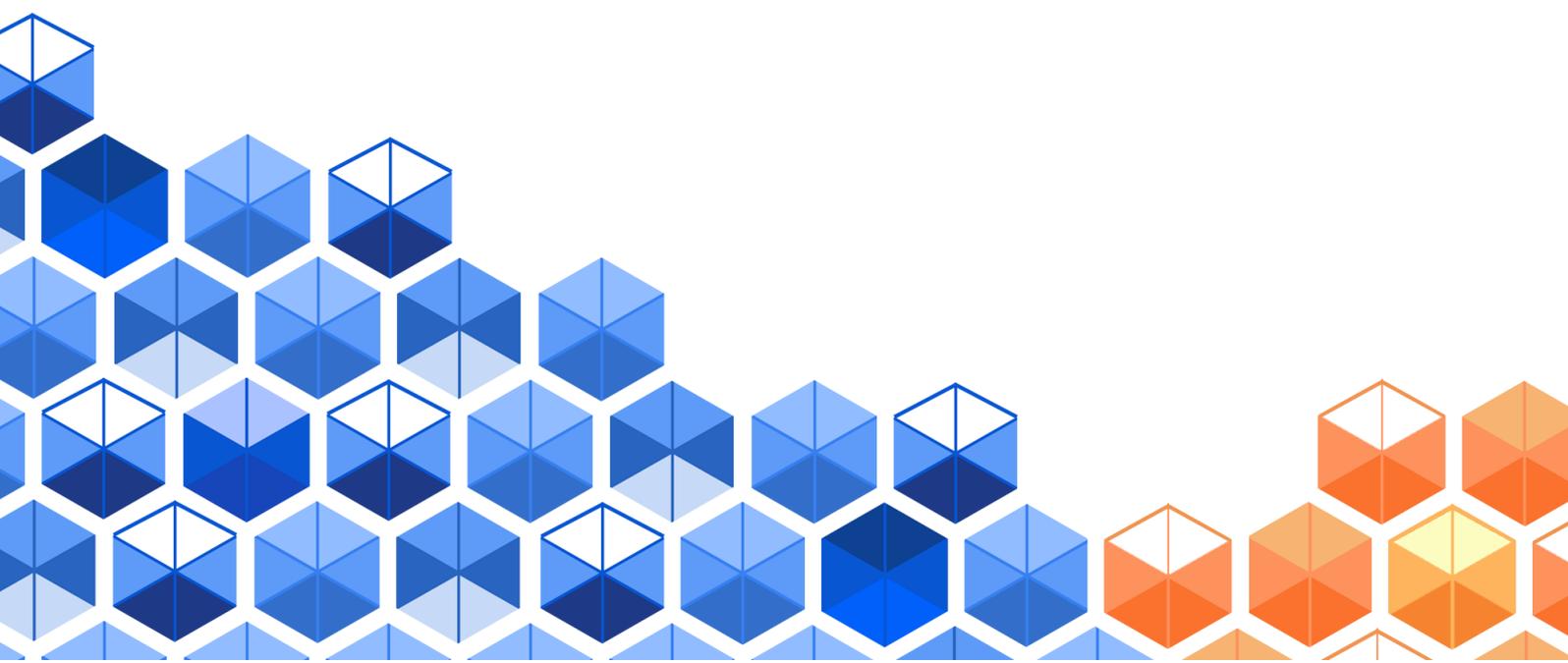
**INDEPENDENT AGENCY  
FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN  
EDUCATION**



# **SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT**

**June 2021**

External review of compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) for reconfirmation of membership in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and renewal of registration on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)



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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (IQAA), established in 2008, is the first independent agency in the sphere of education in Kazakhstan. The mission of IQAA is to contribute to improving the quality of educational institutions, to increase their competitiveness at national and international levels through the development of a quality culture. From the start of its activities, IQAA developed accreditation procedures on the basis of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). IQAA works in line with common trends in the field of quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), national legislation of Kazakhstan and best international practices.

IQAA strives to improve its activities by following the principles of a “learning organisation” that focuses on continuous improvement of the quality of its activities. Since the role of external assessment is crucial for the Agency’s development, IQAA applied for an external review of the Agency to renew its membership in ENQA and registration in EQAR with the aim of continuing conveying best practices in the field of quality assurance.

The preparation of this self-assessment report was an important and valuable self-examination process for the Agency. It provides a solid foundation for further enhancement of its procedures, and creating opportunities for innovation and sustainable development. The previous ENQA coordinated review in 2016 had a significant impact on the development of the Agency and led to many positive reforms, including the establishment of the Supervisory Board and other changes. This report has been prepared by the Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education for the external review by ENQA/EQAR in October 2021.

## **2. ABBREVIATIONS**

CT – Comprehensive Testing  
ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System  
EHEA – European Higher Education Area  
ENQA – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education  
EQAR – European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education  
ESG – The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area  
HEI – Higher Education Institution  
IQAA – Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education  
IQAS – Internal Quality Assurance System  
MES RK – Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan  
NQF – National Qualifications Framework  
NQS – National Qualifications System  
PAM – Post-Accreditation Monitoring  
SAR – Self-Assessment Report  
SCES – State Compulsory Educational Standard  
TVET – Technical and Vocational Education and Training  
UNT – Unified National Test

### **3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT**

The Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education has prepared this self-assessment report for the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) coordinated review in October 2021.

This external review will be the second one for IQAA, and the purpose of this report is not only to highlight current activities of the Agency, but also to reflect on how the recommendations of the ENQA review panel in 2016 were addressed with the aim of improvement of its activities.

There have been many changes both in the Agency’s activities and the higher education system of Kazakhstan as a whole since the previous external assessment, including changes associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. The Agency's self-examination process and the preparation of the self-assessment report began in the summer of 2020 and consisted of the stages outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1. Stages of the IQAA self-assessment report preparation**

<b>№</b>	<b>Description of the activity</b>	<b>Structures/departments responsible</b>	<b>Period of time</b>
1.	Development of an action plan for preparing the self-assessment report	Management	August 2020
2.	Analysis and update of internal regulations and methodological documents	All IQAA departments	August-November 2020
3.	Data collection, study of international experience, collection of internal and external communications	All IQAA departments	August 2020-February 2021
4.	Official application to ENQA/EQAR	Management	November 2020
5.	Development of the draft self-assessment report	All IQAA departments	March-May 2021
6.	Review of the draft self-assessment report	Management, all IQAA Departments	May 2021
7.	Evaluation of the feedback and recommendations for improving the self-assessment report from the Supervisory Board, the Accreditation Council and other stakeholders	Working Group	May 2021
8.	Final review of the IQAA self-assessment report	Working Group	June 2021
9.	Translation of the self-assessment report into English	Department of Analysis and Quality, Working Group	June 2021
10.	IQAA Self-Assessment Report Submission to ENQA	President, Administration	June 2021



**Members of the Working Group for IQAA's Self-Assessment Report:**

Sholpan Kalanova – President, Professor, Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences;  
Karlygash Jigitcheyeva – Head of the Department for Accreditation of Higher Education  
Institutions and Research Institutes, Docent, Candidate of Chemical Sciences;  
Marzhan Ermanova – Head of the Database and IT Department.

## 4. HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

### 4.1 Higher education system in Kazakhstan

The education system and accreditation process are regulated by the [Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education”](#) from 27 July 2007, with amendments and additions as of 2021. The law addresses all levels of education.

*Admission to higher education institutions of Kazakhstan.* Admission to higher education institutions is implemented on the basis of the [Standard Regulations for admission to studies in educational organisations, implementing educational programmes of higher and postgraduate education](#), approved by the Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan from 31 October 2018. Admission of applicants with secondary education is based on the results of the Unified National Test (UNT), which is conducted by the National Testing Centre of the Ministry of Education and Science. Graduates from previous years, applicants with secondary vocational education, graduates of secondary schools studying abroad, as well as other categories of applicants, take the Comprehensive Testing (CT) for admission to higher education institutions in Kazakhstan.

Significant changes have taken place in the admission of applicants in the last five years. In the past, secondary school graduates were able to take the United National Test (UNT) only once a year in June. However, now they are able to take the test several times per year; for example, in May and June – to participate in the competition to receive a state grant for studying in higher education institutions; or in January, March and August – to study in higher educational institutions on a tuition fee basis. These changes have been implemented to relieve emotional stress among secondary school graduates and improve the conditions for passing the entrance exams.

*The structure of the higher education system in Kazakhstan.* Currently, Kazakhstan implements a three-level "bachelor-master-doctor PhD" system of higher education. This structure has been established in the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education”:

Higher basic education:

1) Bachelor's programme – with a duration of 4 years;

Postgraduate higher education:

2) Master's programme – with a duration of 1 year in a specialized field, and 2 years in a scientific-pedagogical direction;

3) The programme for doctors of philosophy (PhD), doctors by profile – with a duration of at least 3 years.

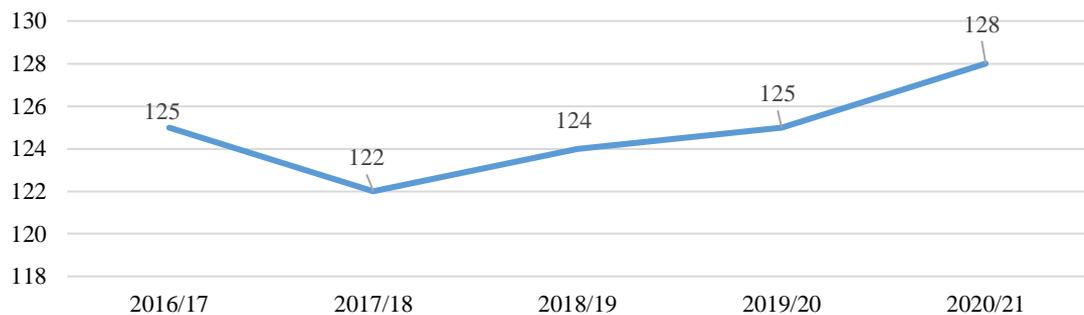
More detailed information on the education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan is presented in the Appendix 1.

In 2011, due to the signing of the Bologna Declaration by Kazakhstan, the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (MES RK) introduced a credit technology system developed based on European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) for all higher education institutions in Kazakhstan. Until 2011, the American credit system was used in Kazakhstan because the United States Embassy in Kazakhstan and American organisations greatly contributed to introducing the American credit system in early 2000's. Therefore, the transition to ECTS was carried out from the American credit system. The aim of the credit technology is to

increase the academic mobility, the quality of education and ensure the continuity of all levels and stages of higher and postgraduate education.

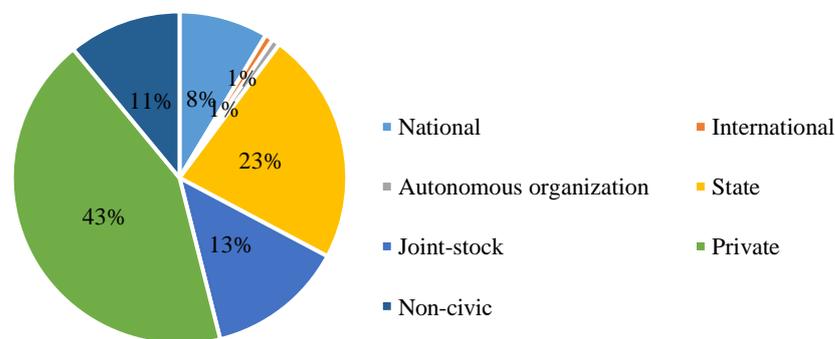
One academic credit in Kazakhstan (30 academic hours) corresponds to one ECTS credit (25-30 academic hours). The conversion rates for ECTS credits vary depending on the level of education and types of study (theoretical, laboratory, studio based and others). Planning of the academic workload of the teaching staff is carried out in academic hours or credits.

*The number of universities, students and faculty in Kazakhstan.* There are 128 higher educational institutions in Kazakhstan as of the beginning of the academic year 2020-2021 (Figure 1), of which 11 – national, 1 – international, 1 – autonomous educational organisation (AEO), 29 – state, 17 – joint-stock, 55 – private, 14 – military (Figure 2).



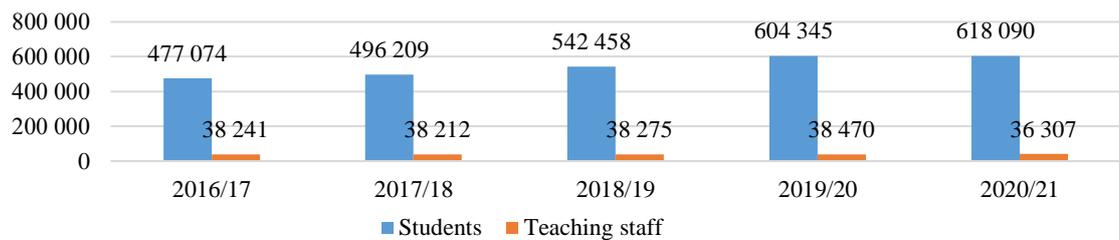
**Figure 1. Dynamics of the number of institutions of higher and postgraduate education from 2016 to 2021 in Kazakhstan**  
(Source: stat.gov.kz)

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan periodically conducts prophylactic control based on the criteria (based on quantitative data) for the activities of higher educational institutions, developed by the Committee for Quality Assurance in the Sphere of Education and Science of the MES RK.



**Figure 2. Types of higher educational institutions in Kazakhstan**

As can be seen in Figure 3, according to the statistics presented by the [Bureau of the National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan](#), as of the beginning of academic year 2020-2021, the total number of students is 618,090: at bachelor’s level – 576,557 students, at master’s level – 34,619 students, and at PhD level – 6,914 students. The total number of teaching staff is 36,307. The number of students has been steadily rising for the last several years due to demographic trends.



**Figure 3. Number of students and teaching staff in HEIs from 2016 to 2021**

As of academic year 2020-2021, 215,224 places in universities or 34.82% of the total number of students were financed by the state budget, of them:

- 189,146 bachelor’s level students (32,81% of the total number of undergraduate students),
- 20,128 – master’s level students (58,14% of the total number of master’s students)
- 5,950 – PhD level students (86.06% of the total number of PhD students).

83% of all students in Kazakhstan study full-time, 7.6% – remotely, 7.3% – part-time and 2.1% in evening classes.

Tuition fees and state grants are the main sources of funding of educational institutions. Higher education institutions additionally receive state funding for scientific research. The state funding of research was limited and accounted for only about 0.2% of GDP until 2020. Last year, the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan made a decision to increase the amount of funding for research and technological development up to 1% of GDP by 2025.

In July 2018, the Ministry of Education and Science has made a number of [changes and additions to certain legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan](#) in three main areas of activity of higher education institutions: academic, managerial and financial. Firstly, the level of academic freedom in universities has been expanded from 65% to 80%. This change has allowed universities to develop educational programmes independently, with the exception of programmes for the cycle of general education disciplines in accordance with the State Compulsory Education Standard (SCES). The organisational and legal form of universities has been changed. At the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Science, all state universities in Kazakhstan were transformed into non-profit joint stock companies with 100% state participation. The new legal form allows universities to comply with corporate governance norms, use revenues earned for overall development and conduct entrepreneurial activities. In addition, universities now can establish endowment funds, start-up companies and attract additional sources of funds to implement their activities. The development of the export of educational services in higher education has led to an increase in the share of foreign students in universities to 6.7%.

*Impact of COVID-19 on higher education in Kazakhstan.* The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impact on the educational process in the Republic of Kazakhstan. From 16 March 2020, all higher education institutions in the country had to switch to distance and online education in order to adapt to the new reality. Although the pandemic has influenced higher education greatly, it is worth noting that it was one of the few sectors that was relatively prepared to transfer its processes into a distant mode. The vast majority of students studied at home; however, 5,000 local students and 4,000 foreign students remained in university dormitories where conditions for sanitary control and distance learning were established.

Kazakh universities have already had experience in introducing distance technologies into the learning process: some universities have already used a blended format while others have used a distance format of education. Under the new conditions, universities used online platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Platonus, Moodle, Webex Cisco and others provided by leading international corporations. A number of universities have used their own self-developed platforms. During the pandemic, universities have provided support to their employees and teaching staff in organising training courses. All universities and colleges had a HelpDesk system that provided technical support to students and teachers.

*National Qualifications Framework (NQF)*. [National Qualifications Framework](#) – a structured description of the qualification levels recognised in the labor market of Kazakhstan. The NQF was developed and approved in Kazakhstan in 2016. It contains eight levels and formally corresponds to the European Qualifications Framework adopted in 2008. It was signed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, the Ministry of Education and Science, and the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs “Atameken”.

The National Qualifications Framework is a constituent element of the [National Qualifications System \(NQS\)](#). NQS is a set of mechanisms for legal and institutional regulation of the demand for specialists in the labor market and the supply of qualifications from the education system. The NQS includes the National Classification of Learning Activities, the National Qualifications Framework, the Sectoral Qualifications Framework, and professional standards. The NQF of higher education of Kazakhstan complies with the EHEA Qualifications Framework. The Dublin Descriptors were used in the development of the NQF level descriptors (Appendix 2).

### *4.2 National system of quality assurance in education*

The development of the quality assurance system in higher education dates back to the 1990s-2000s, when the term “accreditation” first appeared in the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education” in 1999 along with state certification. In 2001, state accreditation was introduced into the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education”; however, it employed only quantitative indicators for external reviews. Being based solely on the provision of statistical information by universities, state accreditation became a subject of widespread criticism due to conflicting results, which ultimately led to its suspension for a long period of time.

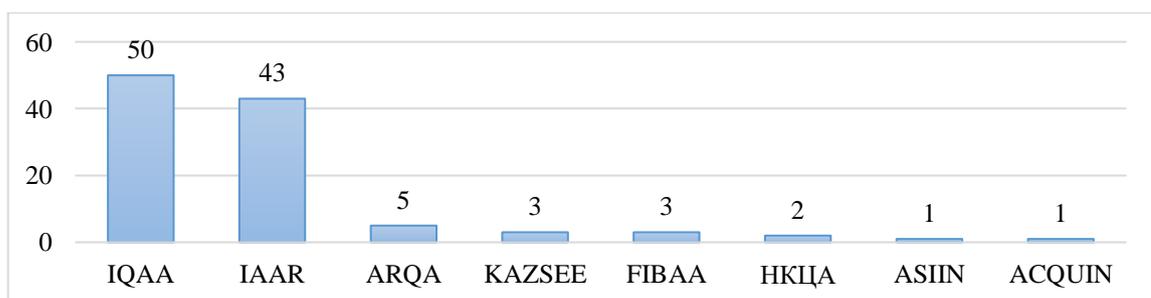
In 2007, in the updated version of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education”, a newly introduced article 9.1. “Accreditation of educational organisations” determined the voluntary nature of accreditation and outlined the implementation of accreditation at the expense of universities. The law spelled out the procedures for conducting accreditation, as well as provided autonomy for accreditation agencies. The implementation of the State Programme of the Development of Education 2011-2020 served as the basis for the adoption of amendments to the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education” in 2011. According to the addition to Article 5, Paragraph 10, the Ministry of Education and Science establishes the requirements and procedure for the recognition of accreditation bodies. The amendment was also introduced to Article 62, Paragraph 5.1., which allows the financing of higher educational institutions on the basis of state educational grants only by accredited universities. In 2012, the [National Register of Accreditation Bodies of Higher Educational Institutions and TVET Institutions No. 1 \(Register 1\)](#) was approved, which included six accreditation agencies: two Kazakh agencies – IQAA, IAAR; and four foreign ones – ACQUIN (Germany), ASIIN (Germany), AQA (Austria), and ABET (United States). Independent accreditation based on the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) moved into a competitive environment.

According to the [State Programme of the Development of Education 2016-2019](#), the Ministry of Education and Science implemented a complete transition of universities from state certification to independent accreditation in 2017. The Law “On Education” stipulates that accreditation is voluntary and higher education institutions are free in choosing accreditation agencies. The only requirement of the law is for universities have to be accredited by accreditation agencies, which are listed in Register 1 of the Ministry of Education and Science, in order to receive state educational grants.

According to the amendments to the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Education" in 2020, higher educational institutions issue diplomas of own type instead of state diplomas from 2021. According to the [Methodological recommendations for organising the issuance of documents of their own type by organisations of higher and \(or\) postgraduate education](#), the own type diplomas are issued by all higher education institutions with the exception of the Academy of Justice, military and other types of special educational institutions. The Ministry of Education and Science is going to control the issuance of diplomas through the establishment of unique series, numbers and QR codes for diplomas of own type for each university. It is expected that this measure will lead to a number of positive effects in the field of higher and postgraduate education. In particular, the quality of higher education and competition between universities for best students should increase, since the government will no longer be held responsible for the quality of education received by students. Therefore, each university will be individually responsible for the quality of higher education.

Independent accreditation increases the competitiveness of higher education institutions at national and international levels. As of now, there are [11 accreditation agencies in the National Register 1](#) – 6 national and 5 foreign. The presence of such a high number of accreditation bodies in Kazakhstan creates a very competitive environment for quality assurance agencies. However, it is important to emphasise that only two accreditation agencies have been reviewed externally so far: IQAA and IAAR are members of ENQA, and are listed on EQAR among the local accreditation agencies in the National Register 1.

There are 110 higher education institutions, 562 organisations of technical and vocational education, 5 organisations of preschool and secondary education, and 59 organisations of additional education that have been accredited in Kazakhstan ([the Register 2 of accredited educational organisations](#)). According to the statistics of the [Centre for the Bologna Process and Academic Mobility Centre of the MES RK](#), 92% of universities in Kazakhstan have institutional accreditation and 96% of universities have programme accreditation as of 2020. IQAA holds a leading position among QA agencies in terms of the number of accredited higher education institutions (Figure 4).



**Figure 4. Number of institutions of higher education that have passed institutional accreditation by accreditation agencies (Bologna Process and Academic Mobility Centre of the MES RK, 2020)**

Supporting the proper quality of higher education is a top priority considering the continuing expansion of the academic, managerial and financial independence of universities. The Ministry of Education and Science, represented by the Committee for Quality Assurance in the Sphere of Education and Science, monitors higher education institutions in a number of ways.

Currently, the Ministry of Education and Science has three main types of control:

- 1) issuance of a general license to operate a higher educational institution;
- 2) issuance of appendices to a license for individual educational programmes;
- 3) implementation of prophylactic control (based on quantitative indicators) of higher education institutions and educational programmes.

## **5. HISTORY, PROFILE AND ACTIVITIES OF IQAA**

### ***5.1. History and development of IQAA***

IQAA was established as a non-governmental, non-profit quality assurance agency in 2008. The creation of the first independent quality assurance agency in Kazakhstan was supported by the academic community of Kazakhstan. IQAA became a pioneer in the development of the national system of independent accreditation in Kazakhstan. IQAA conducted its first institutional accreditation of a university in 2009. A number of universities started undergoing accreditation on a voluntary basis. During this period, the Agency became involved in national processes to promote accreditation in the country. To introduce mechanisms for the motivation of universities for undergoing accreditation, the Agency worked closely with the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan to introduce legislative amendments to the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In addition, the Agency was engaged in an active awareness-raising policy for informing the public about the importance and advantages of accreditation. An amendment to the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education” in 2011, according to which only accredited universities could receive public funding based on educational grants, led to the significant change of the situation in the country. Consequently, the state universities became the first ones to be interested in undergoing accreditation. With the expansion of independent accreditation, the state certification remained only for military (non-civic) universities.

Preparation for the external assessment in 2016 allowed the Agency to improve its activities. The translation of the ESG 2015 into Kazakh and Russian languages by the Agency allowed for a better understanding and application of the ESG among the academic community of Kazakhstan. The revision of the IQAA accreditation standards and procedures based on the ESG 2015 to place more focus on the consistent implementation of external review procedures for universities was carried out. The membership in ENQA in February 2017 and subsequent registration in EQAR in June 2017 heightened the level of responsibility placed on the Agency and contributed to the expansion of the Agency's activities on international level. On 18-19 October 2018, IQAA hosted the annual [9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of ENQA](#), for the first time among the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Over the past five years, the Agency has regularly organised international conferences and forums dedicated to the quality assurance in higher education, and invited leading national and international quality assurance experts.

The re-registration of IQAA in the [National Register 1 of Accreditation Agencies of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan](#) took place in 2017 in accordance with

the Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 112 from 14 March 2017. IQAA actively participates in international projects to contribute to the development of the higher education system. Close cooperation with the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan and employer associations allowed IQAA to strengthen the accreditation in the amendments and additions to the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education” in 2015 and 2018.

### *5.2. Organisational structure of IQAA*

IQAA has five departments, administered by heads of departments. The total number of full-time employees is 20 people, among them: one professor, Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, one associate professor, Candidate of Sciences, one PhD, seven Masters of Sciences and specialists, and two freelance employees who work part-time. The Composition and Provision of each department can be found in the Agency's documents. The organisational structure of the IQAA consists of the following departments:

#### **Administrative and International Relations Department**

The department is in charge of maintaining accounting records, personnel management and legal contracts, and day-to-day office and administrative duties. The department is also responsible for international relations and cooperation, including contacts and correspondence with partner agencies and international networks.

#### **Department of Accreditation of Higher Educational Institutions**

The responsibilities of the department include the organisation of audits, selection of review experts and carrying out of external reviews for institutional and programme accreditation of higher education institutions, preparation of accreditation documents and materials (self-assessment reports, external review reports, etc.) for the Accreditation Council. Jointly with the Department for Reviewing Reports and Post-Accreditation Monitoring, and Expert Councils, the department prepares conclusions and presentations based on the results of external review reports for the Accreditation Council. The head of the department serves as the Technical Secretary of the Accreditation Council.

#### **Department for Reviewing External Review Reports and Post-Accreditation Monitoring**

The main task of the department is to review external review reports for subsequent publication on the official IQAA website and DEQAR. The staff of the department work in collaboration with the IQAA Expert Councils on Institutional and Programme Accreditation, which check external review reports and submit their conclusions to the Accreditation Council. In addition, the department carries out post-accreditation monitoring of accredited higher education institutions and educational programmes.

#### **Department of Analysis and Quality**

The department is responsible for the processing and analysing data on the quality of activities carried out in the field of quality assurance of educational organisations and educational programmes in Kazakhstan and abroad. Department staff collects and translates documents on best international practices and shares the information among the staff members of the Agency. The department also prepares thematic reports and bulletins on best international practices for educational institutions.

#### **Department of Databases and Information Technologies**

The department is responsible for designing and refining the databases of the Agency, and ensuring the security of the Agency's corporate data. The department deals with the maintenance of

technical and office equipment, operating systems and software programmes. The department works on the development and updating of the Agency's website and other related duties.

### ***5.3. Governing bodies***

**The Supervisory Board** is the highest governing body of the Agency. The composition of the Supervisory Board consists of five members. The Chair of the Supervisory Board is a prominent public figure, ex-Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Professor Jaksylyk Kulekeyev. Members of the Supervisory Board include the Deputy of the Majilis (Lower Chamber) of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan Aigul Zhumabayeva, an international expert in the field of quality assurance of higher education, a representative of employers and the President of the Agency. The main function of the Supervisory Board is to approve the [Agency's Strategy of Development](#), the regulations on the Accreditation Council, annual reports and work plans, and participate in key IQAA events. The full composition of the Supervisory Board and their CVs are available on the [website of IQAA](#).

**The Accreditation Council** is an independent, elected and collegial body composed of representatives of key stakeholder groups: educational institutions and research institutes, an international expert, student and employers' representatives. The term of office of all members is five years with the possibility of reappointment, with the exception of students who are appointed for the period of their studies at higher education institutions: usually for one to two years. The [Regulations on the Accreditation Council](#) are available on the Agency's website.

#### **Functions of Accreditation Council:**

- Making decisions on institutional accreditation of educational organisations;
- Making decisions on programme accreditation of educational organisations;
- Approval of standards and criteria for institutional accreditation;
- Approval of standards and criteria for programme accreditation (Bachelor's degree, Master's degree);
- Approval of standards and criteria for doctoral degree programmes;
- Approval of the external standard of conducting external visits (audits) in educational organisations;
- Approval of the [Regulations on the Appeals Commission](#) and the appeals procedure;
- Approval of the [Regulations on the Commission of Complaints](#) and procedure of reviewing complaints;
- Approval of other documents within the competence of the Accreditation Council.

Higher educational institutions, research institutes, colleges, student organisation "Alliance of Students of Kazakhstan" and employers' associations propose candidates for membership in the Accreditation Council. The Agency forms the Commission for reviewing applications of candidates. The following rules determine the selection process:

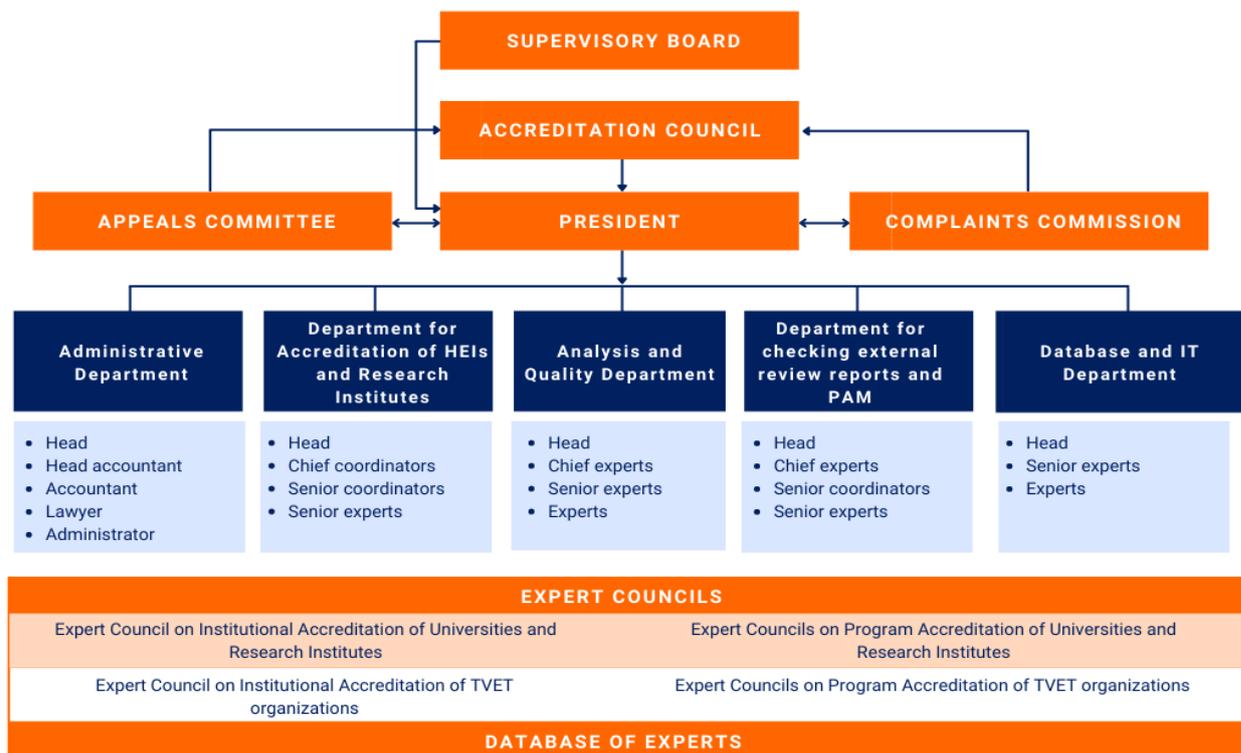
- 1) Candidates who have served the purpose of improving quality of higher education in Kazakhstan have priority;
- 2) A member of the Accreditation Council cannot be an official of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan;
- 3) The Accreditation Council cannot include more than one member from the same institution;
- 4) At least one student representative and one employer representative have be members of the Accreditation Council;

5) The Accreditation Council has to include an international expert in the field of quality assurance in higher education who is fluent in either Kazakh or Russian languages.

After the end of the term of office or voluntary resignation of a member of the Accreditation Council, the Agency invites stakeholders such as educational institutions, the Alliance of Students of Kazakhstan and employer associations to nominate candidates for the Accreditation Council. When candidates are nominated, the Agency's Commission, which consists of three members, discusses candidates' profiles and makes a decision based on voting. Based on the Commission's decision, the President signs the Order on the appointment of new members of the Accreditation Council. Signing the [Code of Ethics of an Accreditation Council member](#) and contract is an obligatory procedure for new Accreditation Council members before they start to work.

**IQAA President** is the chief executive, who acts in accordance with the Charter of the Agency, paragraph 9.15: carries out general management of the Agency, ensures effectiveness of the activities, signs contracts and agreements on behalf of the institution, approves internal regulations, rules, procedures and other documents regulating activities of the institution, and represents IQAA in state and civic structures.

**Expert Councils** are collegial bodies that represent review experts on institutional accreditation and accreditation of educational programmes by fields. The main tasks of the Expert Councils are the reviewing of reports prepared by external review panels and the preparation of conclusions based on the results of external reviews for the meetings of the Accreditation Council. Each Expert Council includes representatives of universities who are experts in the Committee's profile. The [Regulations on Expert Councils](#) are available on the IQAA website.



**Figure 5. IQAA’s organisational structure**

The **Appeals Commission** is a collegial body that considers appeals of educational organisations against decisions of the Accreditation Council for institutional and programme accreditation. The decision on an appeal is made by the Appeals Commission in accordance with the [Regulations on the Appeals Commission and the Appeals Procedure](#).

The Appeals Commission consists of five recognised experts with significant experience in the field of quality assurance in higher education, the majority of whom have qualifications in Law. The Appeals Commission for the consideration of an appeal of a particular educational institution consists of three people, chosen by the Agency, so that there is no conflict of interest between the members of the Appeals Commission and an educational institution. The Commission considers appeals of educational institutions in the written form. If the appeal contains issues that fall under the complaints procedure, the Appeals Commission refers these issues to the Complaints Commission for consideration.

**The Complaints Commission.** There are clear and published procedures for responding to complaints from educational institutions that disagree with the comments and recommendations of review panels in external review reports. Review of complaints by educational institutions allows identifying possible violations committed during external reviews, and offers recommendations for their elimination. The review of complaints allows monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the procedures used, maintaining the openness and responsibility of the Agency's experts and employees, and constitutes the strategy aimed at improving the quality of external reviews. The [Regulations on the procedure of reviewing complaints](#) can be found on the IQAA website.

#### ***5.4. IQAA activities to promote students' interests***

One of the ESG requirements is to engage students to participate in both internal quality assurance systems as well as external evaluations of higher education institutions and educational programmes. The degree of students' contentment with educational services provided by educational institutions is one of the important elements in assessing the quality of education. Students' participation in external evaluation is translated into active processes of enhancing the learning process. This is achieved in a number of ways, including students' assessment of the content of educational programmes, the level of satisfaction with the quality of teaching, the exchange of views of students and university administration at regular meetings, as well as the representation of students' interests by student unions and committees. Accreditation agencies play an important role in transmitting the main recommendations and suggestions of students to improve the quality of education.

The civic organisation “Alliance of Students of Kazakhstan” was established in 2015. Initially, it actively worked in universities of Kazakhstan; then there was a decline in its activity due to a lack of state and university funding. Since 2017, the organisation began to function again, and in 2019, IQAA and the "Alliance of Students of Kazakhstan" signed the Memorandum of Cooperation. The establishment of partnership and cooperation aims to ensure quality of higher education through consistent engagement of student representatives.

*The participation of student representatives in the IQAA accreditation procedures* ensures their active participation in external reviews of educational institutions, and promotes their interests. In accordance with the [Rules for the Selection of Experts for the External Reviews of IQAA](#) and the

[Regulations on the Accreditation Council](#), student representatives are required to participate in external assessments during institutional and programme accreditation, and as members of the Accreditation Council at all times. Promotion of student interests has been the firm policy of IQAA since its establishment.

The Agency has developed the [Guidelines for student experts](#) involved in external evaluation processes to instruct students on the Agency's accreditation procedures and standards. The Guidelines aim to clarify the role of students and their participation in external reviews, and to familiarise students with the standards and criteria for external evaluation of the quality of education at higher education institutions. The Guidelines were developed using up-to-date information on the implementation of student-centred learning developed by the European Students' Union (ESU) and experts of the Erasmus+ projects. The Guidelines are available on the Agency's website. Moreover, the IQAA website has a separate [tab for students](#), which provides detailed information about the participation of students in accreditation processes.

*IQAA events to engage students in the quality assurance system of higher education.* Every year, the President of IQAA, Prof. Sholpan Kalanova reads lectures on accreditation and quality assurance for the graduate and doctoral students at the Graduate School of Education at the Nazarbayev University (a flagship higher education institution in Kazakhstan), including describing quality assurance developments within the European Higher Education Area. The last lecture was held on 26 October 2020, the topic was “The impact of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) on the national education quality assurance system of Kazakhstan”.

Some universities send graduate students to the Agency for internships (1-2 weeks). In 2020, six graduate students of the Kazakh National Women's Pedagogical University, from the educational programme "Pedagogical Dimensions", completed the scientific internship at IQAA from 17 February 2020 to 29 February 2020. They familiarised themselves with the ESG, materials developed by ENQA, as well as the Standards and Guidelines for institutional and programme accreditation of IQAA. At first, the President and the heads of departments conducted lectures and practical classes for the interns; then, they were allocated within the departments for individual work.

On 6 November 2020, the XVII Republican Meeting of the Alliance of Students of Kazakhstan was held at the Narikbayev KAZGUU University with the support of the Ministry of Information and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Agency participated in this event with a presentation on the role of students in quality assurance, including the support for academic integrity in universities.

On 12 February 2021, IQAA held an online training seminar on the topic [“The role of students in external quality assurance”](#) for undergraduate and graduate students with the participation of 72 students from 34 universities of Kazakhstan. The Agency's employees and a student representative who participated in external reviews as a member of an external review panel presented at the seminar up-to-date information on the Bologna Process, student-centred education and external quality assurance. The most active students from the training seminar were consequently invited to participate in external audits of higher education institutions.

### ***5.5. IQAA's national cooperation***

*IQAA social partners.* Special attention is paid to employers' representatives in the QA activities of IQAA, as they participate in external reviews, and are represented in the Accreditation Council

and the Supervisory Board. The Agency works with employer enterprises and associations for beneficial cooperation aimed at ensuring quality and promoting in higher education. The Agency has memoranda of cooperation with the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs “Atameken” and [15 professional associations](#) of employers, including the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs “National Industrial Chamber of Kazakhstan”, The Association of IT Companies of Kazakhstan, The Association of Kazakhstan Machinery Industry, the Association of Light Industry Enterprises of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the Association of Taxpayers and Accountants. Representatives of employer associations participate in external reviews conducted by the Agency.

Representatives of employers play an important role in the system of ensuring the quality of education. In accordance with the [Rules for the Selection of Experts for External Reviews of IQAA](#), the [Regulations on the Accreditation Council](#) and the [Regulations on the Supervisory Board](#), the Agency has to involve employers’ representatives in quality assurance of higher education at various levels: as members of external review panels, and as members of the Accreditation Council and Supervisory Board of IQAA. Employer experts are trained during annual international conferences dedicated to the training of review experts and at webinars before external audits take place. Webinars before external audits are conducted by coordinators of the Agency. The online training seminar for employers from all regions of Kazakhstan on the topic ["The role of experts-representatives of employers in external quality assurance"](#) was organised in April 2021. The purpose of the seminar was to provide up-to-date information on accreditation and the role of employer representatives in external quality assurance.

*Cooperation with governmental bodies.* The President of IQAA regularly meets with representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science, and participates in weekly meetings of the Ministry in online format. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Science holds meetings with accreditation agencies several times a year, in which the representatives of the Agency take part.

The Agency participates in discussions and reviews of normative legal acts on the assessment of quality in higher education and other related issues, which are organised by legislative authorities, governmental and professional organisations. The President of IQAA was an expert in the working group of the Majilis (Lower Chamber) of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan on preparation of the amendments and additions to the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education” in 2018.

The Agency took active participation in the round tables organised by the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan on 24 December 2018 on the topic “Subject issues of legislative support for vocational education in the Republic of Kazakhstan”, and on 11 December 2019 on the topic “Further improvement of the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan on improving the quality of education”. At both of the events, the President of IQAA made reports on amendment proposals of the Rules of Recognition of Accreditation Bodies by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In 2017, the Agency employees participated in the working group on the development of a tiered model of advanced training for engineering and pedagogical workers in the system of technical and vocational education of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Between 2017 and 2018, the President of IQAA was a “secret expert” of the Institute of Economic Development of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and was tasked with reviewing activities of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the implementation of the Government Strategy for the Development of Education.

In 2016-2019, IQAA was the country coordinator of the Erasmus+ project “Promoting the internationalisation of research through the establishment and operation of a third cycle quality assurance system in line with the European Integration Agenda (C3QA)”. Within the framework of this project, amendments to the State Mandatory Standard of Postgraduate Education and the Standard Provisions on the Dissertation Council were made based on the [recommendations](#) of the IQAA.

## **6. IQAA'S QUALITY ASSURANCE ACTIVITIES IN EDUCATION**

### **External quality assurance activities of IQAA:**

- Institutional accreditation of higher education institutions;
- Initial institutional accreditation of higher education institutions;
- Accreditation of educational programmes (Bachelor's and Master's degrees) of higher education institutions;
- Initial accreditation of educational programmes (Bachelor's and Master's degrees) of higher educational institutions;
- Accreditation of doctoral degree educational programmes of higher education institutions;
- Initial accreditation of doctoral degree educational programmes of higher educational institutions;
- Institutional accreditation of the departments of education of research institutes;
- Accreditation of educational programmes (residencies) of the departments of education of research institutes;
- Institutional accreditation of TVET institutions;
- Accreditation of educational programmes of TVET institutions;
- Institutional accreditation of preschool education organisations;
- Institutional accreditation of additional education organisations.

### **Additional IQAA activities:**

- Organisation of international conferences, workshops, and forums on quality assurance of higher education;
- Training of quality assurance experts on the basis of seminars and webinars;
- Publication of thematic reports, analysis of review results;
- Cooperation with foreign accreditation agencies;
- Participation and membership in international quality assurance associations and networks;
- Taking part in international projects (including Erasmus+ projects);
- Participation in the development of normative and legal acts on the assessment of the quality of education, developed by the Ministry of Education and Science;
- Participation in round tables and other meetings held by the Majilis (Lower Chamber) and the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan on quality assurance in education;
- Conducting training for the self-assessment in educational institutions.

**Initial institutional accreditation (ex-ante) of higher education institutions** – the process of assessing the quality of recently opened higher education institutions (licensed by the state for educational activities) without the graduation of students, for compliance with the declared status and standards of the accreditation body. For example, the initial institutional accreditations of the recently opened NJSC “Kazakh National Academy of Choreography” of the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the International University “Astana” of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the International University of Tourism and Hospitality of the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan, were conducted by the Agency in 2016, 2019 and 2020, respectively. It has to be noted that initial institutional accreditation is carried out by the Agency only if universities receive the general state license with the right to conduct educational activities, the state license for educational programmes, and state educational grants for students.

**Initial programme accreditation (ex-ante) of higher education institutions** – a procedure for assessing the quality of recently opened educational programmes (licensed by the state for educational activities) without the graduation of students, for compliance with the declared status and standards of the accreditation body. Due to the fact that educational programmes do not yet have graduates, the process of conducting initial programme accreditation has several distinctive features. The main emphasis in the evaluation programme is placed on the possibility of achieving the goals of educational programmes with available resources. During the initial programme accreditation, the qualification requirements of the teaching staff, educational resources, and material and technical equipment are evaluated with the purpose of achieving learning goals.

Initial accreditation status of an educational institutions/educational programmes is granted when educational institutions/educational programmes demonstrate potential to meet the IQAA accreditation standards. Initial institutional accreditation encompasses all procedures of external reviews in accordance with the standards and criteria for accreditation of educational institutions/educational programmes, with the exception of interviews with graduates or students, and employers.

In connection with the approval of the new version of the Standards of Institutional and Programme Accreditation in November 2020, conditional accreditation of educational institutions and educational programmes was canceled (Order No. 20 from 30 November 2020 based on the decision of the Accreditation Council from 28 November 2020, and Order No. 13/1 from 27 July 2020 based on the decision of the Accreditation Council from 25 July 2020).

At the present, higher education institutions and educational programmes can be accredited for two years, five years, and seven years. According to the [Regulations on Decision-Making of the IQAA Accreditation Council Concerning Institutional Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions](#) and the [Regulations on Decision-Making of the IQAA Accreditation Council Concerning Programme Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions](#), higher education institutions and educational programmes can receive a maximum period of accreditation (seven years) if they demonstrate outstanding achievements and positive practices.

After accreditation of higher education institutions or educational programmes, the Agency annually conducts post-accreditation monitoring (PAM). Higher education institutions and research institutes must annually submit reports on major changes and achievements that occurred during the year for continuous monitoring and periodic evaluation. In addition, after two to three years, post-accreditation monitoring is selectively carried out with a site visit in some higher education institutions. Usually, these are higher education institutions or educational programmes

with more remarks or recommendations for improvement from external review reports. Full procedures are described in the [Regulations on Post-Accreditation Monitoring](#).

The Agency has a high reputation for integrity, objectivity, and professionalism among higher education institutions of Kazakhstan. Today, there are six national and five foreign accreditation agencies operating in Kazakhstan; however, IQAA has retained leading positions in the sphere of quality assurance. IQAA ensures the separation of activities within and outside the scope of the ESG by having separate standards and criteria as well as guidelines for higher education institutions and research institutes (within the scope of the ESG) and TVET institutions and additional education organisations (outside the scope of the ESG).

### *6.1 IQAA activities within the scope of the ESG*

The activities of IQAA within the scope of the ESG include the accreditation of higher education institutions and educational programmes of higher education institutions. The Agency also conducts accreditation of research institutes and their educational programmes (residencies). External reviews are conducted in accordance with the Standards and Criteria of the Agency:

- [Standards and Criteria for Institutional Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions](#)
- [Standards and Criteria for Programme Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions](#)
- [Standards and Criteria for Accreditation of the Third Cycle \(Doctoral Studies\) Educational Programmes](#)
- [Standards and Criteria for Institutional Accreditation of Medical and Science Organisations \(research institutes\)](#)

From 2017, IQAA conducted institutional accreditation in 52 higher education institutions. Three universities passed initial accreditation. During the same period, the Agency conducted accreditation of 1436 educational programmes. 83 programmes were initially accredited. For the last five years, the Agency conducted institutional accreditation of five research institutes. As for programme accreditation of research institutes, programmes accreditations of 24 programmes were conducted. 12 educational programmes of research institutes were initially accredited.

### *6.2 IQAA activities outside the scope of the ESG*

Since 2013, in addition to the accreditation of higher education institutions, IQAA has been conducting institutional and programme accreditation of technical and vocational education (TVET) institutions. The Standards and Criteria for institutional and programme accreditation of TVET institutions have been developed. Significant work was done for the development of methodological documents, guidelines for the preparation of self-assessment reports for institutional and programme accreditation of TVET institutions. Currently, as a result, due to the amendments to the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education” in 2020, the state certification of TVET organisations has been reintroduced from 1 July 2021, although voluntary institutional and programme accreditation of TVET institutions is preserved. As a result, the number of TVET institutions that undergo accreditation has significantly decreased recently. Over a five-year period, The Agency accredited 141 TVET institutions and 589 educational programmes of TVET institutions.

Since 2017, IQAA conducts institutional accreditation of additional education organisations, mostly in the field of healthcare based on the [Standards and Criteria for Institutional Accreditation](#)

[of Additional Medical and Pharmaceutical Education](#) developed by the Agency. Institutional accreditation of additional education organisations is based on assessing the quality of additional education organisations for compliance with the declared status and standards of the Agency. Eight additional education organisations were accredited.

### *6.3 Cross-border accreditation*

Cross-border review of the quality of higher education institutions is not one of the main goals of the Agency; however, it is important for IQAA to expand quality assurance activities to extend the principles of the ESG beyond the EHEA to Central Asia and adjacent regions of Eurasia. Since 2018, IQAA has been conducting cross-border accreditation of foreign universities. In 2019, IQAA was officially registered in the National Register of Accreditation Agencies of the Kyrgyz Republic. Three educational programmes of the International University of Kyrgyzstan were accredited. The review panel consisted of external experts from three countries.

In 2020, six educational programmes of the Faculty of Chemistry of the Baku State University, the flagship university in the Republic of Azerbaijan, were accredited by IQAA. The external review panel included quality assurance experts from six countries. Spreading the culture of quality within the university, the significant work of the Faculty of Chemistry to prepare for accreditation, were positively evaluated by the panel of international experts. Currently, IQAA is expanding the geography of external quality assurance activities and is in the process of carrying out programme accreditation at a university in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

## **7. QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES AND METHODOLOGY**

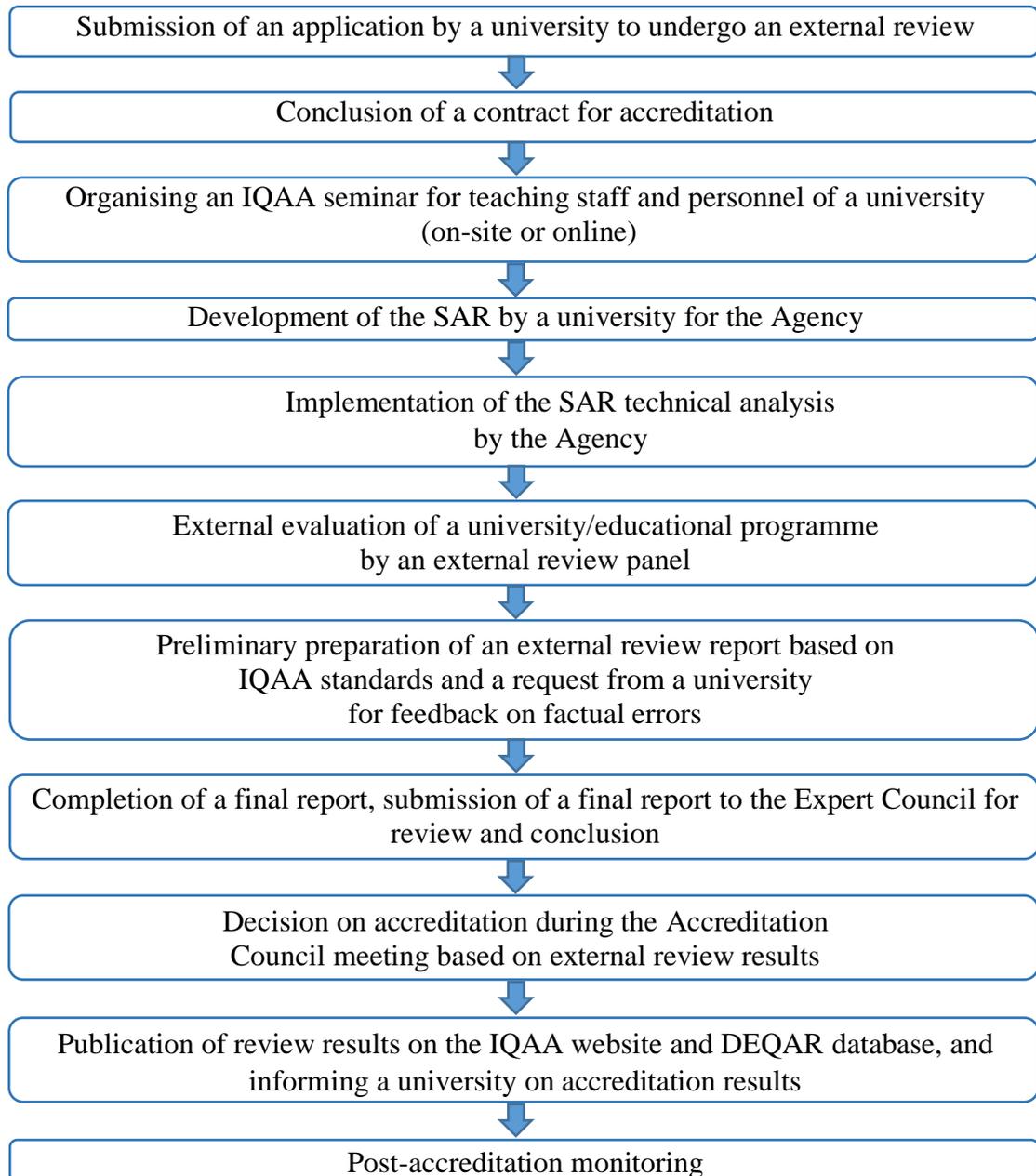
The methodology of institutional and programme accreditation of IQAA is developed in accordance with the European and international standards. In general, the methodology of external evaluation has been adjusted since the last evaluation period of ENQA in 2016 in connection with the changes in legislation and consequences of the pandemic. The institutional and programme accreditation procedures are conducted according to the scheme illustrated in Figure 6.

In the face of uncertainty caused with the COVID-19 pandemic, IQAA has strived to remain a vector of support for educational institutions. Due to the spread of the pandemic, the state of emergency and quarantine regime were introduced in the Republic of Kazakhstan on 16 March 2020 (Presidential Decrees No. 285 from 15 March 2020 and No. 306 from 14 April 2020). In accordance with the measures taken by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and in order to minimise potential risks, two new external review formats were developed and implemented: the hybrid format and the distant format. IQAA has developed and approved the [Guidelines for the Organisation and Conduct of Hybrid and Distant External Reviews \(Audits\) in the Framework of Institutional and Programme Accreditation](#).

**Hybrid audit format** – a visit to an educational organisation by a limited number external review panel members and an IQAA coordinator, while other members of review panels participate in external reviews remotely. The videoconference platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Cisco Webex, and others are used for this purpose. Live videoconference calls on mobile devices through WhatsApp and other platforms are used to display higher education institutions' premises to experts who participate in external reviews remotely. Cloud services are used to provide access to necessary documents, which are digitised in advance. To minimise risks of the pandemic, the number of respondents present at higher education institutions' premises during interviews with

external review panels is reduced. Therefore, a significant part of interviewees participates in external reviews in the remote format as well.

**Distant audit format** – a format when external reviews are conducted exclusively online by members of external review panels and an IQAA coordinator. It is carried out through videoconference platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Cisco Webex, and others. All documents are digitised in advance and provided to the IQAA coordinator and external review panels. Representatives of educational institutions and interviewees on the behalf of educational institutions also participate in interviews during external reviews in the remote format.

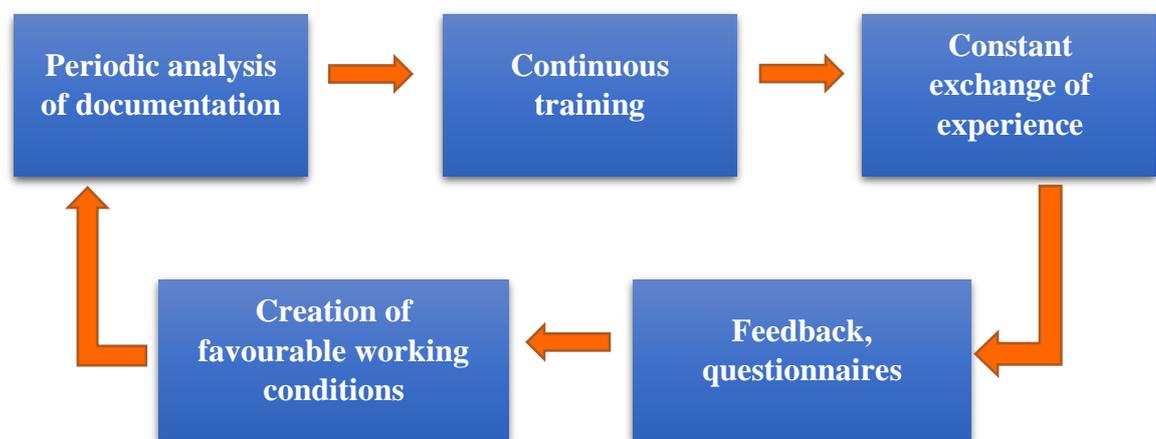


**Figure 6. Procedure for institutional and programme accreditation**

## 8. IQAA’S INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Agency's internal quality assurance policy is reflected in its mission, vision, and values, and is updated annually as part of the IQAA management review. The IQAA's Internal Quality Assurance Committee consists of the Agency's President, the Head of the Department for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Research Institutes, and the Head of the Analysis and Quality Department. Its main function is to ensure the improvement of internal procedures by analysing the effectiveness of the internal quality system of the Agency. In this regard, IQAA regularly conducts various procedures, including training seminars for employees, and surveys for feedback and employee contentment.

In order to systematise and improve the effectiveness of internal quality assurance, the Agency has developed and implemented the [Guidelines on Internal Quality Assurance](#), which are periodically revised to reflect ongoing changes. The Guidelines define the interaction of all elements of the internal quality assurance system and highlight the following processes: periodic analysis of documentation, continuous training of employees, constant exchange of experience, creation of favourable working conditions, receiving feedback, exchange of views at meetings and questionnaires of employees (Figure 7).



**Figure 7. Internal quality assurance system (IQAS) of IQAA**

*Periodic analysis of documentation.* Analysis and updating of the Agency's internal regulatory documents are carried out periodically. The revision of the documentation is implemented by taking into account the opinions of stakeholders, recommendations and suggestions of the Agency's employees, and based on best practices of European accreditation agencies with which IQAA cooperates. All internal regulatory documents of the Agency, as well as changes and additions, are approved by the President of IQAA (Appendix 5). The new version of the documents are sent to the corporate emails of employees for review and posted on the Agency's website for stakeholders.

*Continuing education.* IQAA regularly organises internal training seminars and conferences to improve the effectiveness of the Agency's activities. Training seminars cover various topics to involve employees in internal processes and motivate them to perform effectively. Within the framework of such seminars, Agency employees prepare presentations on the activities of their departments. Such events allow employees to get acquainted with the activities of each department and discuss issues of interest. A list of training seminars on internal quality assurance and professional development activities for the Agency's employees is provided in Appendix 3.

*Exchange of experience.* The Agency cooperates with partner accreditation agencies, and encourages employees to participate in various conferences and workshops on quality assurance in higher education in order to exchange experience, share good practices and develop joint projects. Cooperation is based on the principles of equality, partnership, transparency and integrity. The Agency's management and staff regularly participate in various national and international projects and events to exchange experience. Employees, who participate in these events, share their knowledge and experience with colleagues through internal workshops/round tables/discussions (Appendix 4). Thus, employees of the Agency get the most out of their work, learn to gather knowledge, share and apply it.

*Feedback, questionnaires.* In order to improve the efficiency of its activities, the Agency regularly conducts employee satisfaction surveys. Feedback allows management to receive up-to-date information about the functioning of the Agency, adjust the work of departments, and increase productivity and efficiency in general.

In September 2020, the Agency conducted the [Survey of employees on the level of contentment with working conditions](#). The results demonstrated a high degree of contentment of IQAA employees with working conditions, as well as with prospects for professional and personal growth. In general, employees consider it prestigious to work for the Agency.

*Creating favorable working environment.* The Agency strives to create favorable and comfortable working conditions for employees. Each employee's workplace is equipped with necessary technical equipment, software, and materials to perform the assigned tasks. All rooms in the office are equipped with arts reproductions of world-famous artists or originals of local artists for aesthetic purposes. For more information about human, technical, and material resources, see [Standard ESG 3.5: Resources](#)

*Quality culture.* The Agency maintains a strong corporate spirit and corporate ethics among its employees and management. All employees sign the [Agency's Code of Ethics](#), which contains general provisions on corporate ethics, work relations, and other standards of ethical conduct. In the [IQAA Development Strategy for 2019-2023](#), the strategic priority number four is aimed at promoting the organisational culture of quality to ensure the successful operation of the Agency.

## **9. IQAA'S INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES**

The commitment to internationalisation is expressed in all activities of the Agency: participation and membership in international quality assurance associations and networks, organisation and participation in international conferences and workshops, taking part in international projects to improve the quality of higher education, cooperation with foreign accreditation agencies, participation of international experts in external review panels, the Accreditation Council and Supervisory Board of the Agency.

In order to integrate Kazakhstan's education system into the global educational space, IQAA is constantly working on internationalising its activities. The fifth strategic priority of the IQAA Development Strategy 2019-2023 "Recognition of the Agency on international level", establishes the internationalisation of the Agency's activities in various directions as one of the target indicators.

*IQAA membership in international networks and registers:*

- ✓ **ENQA** – associate membership/affiliate status since 2008, membership since 2017;

- ✓ **INQAAHE** – full membership since 2008;
- ✓ **APQN** – full membership since 2008;
- ✓ **CEENQA** – full membership since 2014;
- ✓ **CIQG-CHEA** – full membership since 2015;
- ✓ **EQAR** – registration from 2017.

*International partners.* The Agency has bilateral agreements and memoranda of cooperation with [16 foreign accreditation agencies](#). IQAA maintains active cooperation with partner accreditation agencies in order to exchange best practices, train review experts, cooperate in organising conferences and workshops, implement joint projects, provide support in terms of updating the content of internal regulatory and methodological documents, and represent joint interests at national and international levels. Working for more than ten years in the field of quality assurance, IQAA highly values its partnerships.

*IQAA participation in international projects.* During the reporting period 2016-2021, the Agency participated in the following international projects:

**C3QA** – Erasmus+ project “Promoting Internationalisation of Research through Establishment and Operationalisation of Cycle 3 Quality Assurance System in line with the European Integration Agenda”, funded with the support of the European Commission, in which IQAA acted as a country coordinator from Kazakhstan. The implementation period of the project was from October 2016 to October 2019.

IQAA is currently participating in the **DEQAR CONNECT**, Erasmus+ project “*Enhancing the Coverage and Connectivity of QA in the EHEA through DEQAR*”, funded with the support of the European Commission. The project aims to expand connectivity through the use of DEQAR by taking use of existing synergies and exploring new opportunities. The implementation period of the project is from March 2020 to March 2022.

IQAA is taking part in the **KazDual**, Erasmus+ project “Implementation of the Dual System in Kazakhstan”, funded with the support of the European Commission. The aim of the project is the adaptation of a dual system in Kazakshtan to improve the competencies of students based on market requirements, advance employability of graduates and enhance cooperation with employers. The implementation period of the project is from February 2021 to February 2024.

International projects help the Agency to contribute by raising awareness about the quality of higher education in Kazakhstan and the international community and making recommendations to legislative acts and regulatory documents of the Ministry of Education and Science. Pilot accreditations of educational programmes are conducted within the framework of projects. Moreover, by participating in international projects, the Agency's employees expand their knowledge in the field of quality assurance in higher education, exchange experience with staff of partner organisations, and build professional capacity.

*Organisation of international events by IQAA.* The Agency annually conducts international conferences, workshops and forums with the participation of national and international experts. The full list of events is available in [the News tab](#) on the Agency's official website.

On **2 December 2016**, the President of the Agency, Sholpan Kalanova presented about Kazakhstan's experience on QA reforms in higher education as one of the key speakers during the international conference "Quality Assurance in Higher Education" based on the invitation by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Baku.

The international conference "Management of the internal quality assurance system in higher education", with key speakers as Prof. Lucien Bollaert and Melinda Szabo (EQAR), was organised on **6 April 2018**. The well-known book "A Manual for Internal Quality Assurance in Higher Education" by Prof. Lucien Bollaert was translated by IQAA for this event. EURASHE gave its permission to publish up to 200 copies of the manual for the purposes of the conference so that all participants of the conference would be able to get a translated edition of Prof. Lucien Bollaert's book.

On **18-19 October 2018**, the 9<sup>th</sup> ENQA General Assembly was hosted by IQAA in Astana, Kazakhstan, for the first time among the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The survey of the General Assembly participants conducted by the ENQA Secretariat displayed a high ranking of the organisation and management of the event, 5 points – by 70% of respondents, 4 points – by 30% of respondents, on a five-point scale. Around 100 international participants from more than 40 countries attended the event.

**The Eurasian Forum on Quality Assurance in Higher Education** is an annual event organised by IQAA since 2018, which serves as the platform for discussing most relevant issues in the field of higher education and quality assurance with the participation of leading national and international academics, government officials, student and labor market representatives, as well as other stakeholder groups. One of the main aims of the Eurasian Forum is to foster quality assurance of higher education in the adjacent regions of Eurasia. The Eurasian Forum allows participants to get up-to-date information on quality assurance in the region and beyond on the behalf of leading national, regional and international experts in the field of higher education and quality assurance.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Eurasian Forum took place on 20-21 September 2018, where the representatives of Kazakh and foreign universities and accreditation agencies assembled to share their experience and knowledge in the field of higher education and quality assurance. On 16 September 2019, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Eurasian Forum was dedicated to digitalisation of universities and quality assurance in higher education. Since the topic of the Forum was quite relevant, the Forum received national news coverage. Based on the Forum, the state TV channel "Khabar" released a documentary about digitalisation in education, including interviews with the Chair of the IQAA Supervisory Board, Prof. Zhaksybek Kulekeyev, the President of EQAR, Prof. Karl Dietrich, the Chief Executive of QAA, Douglas Blackstock, and other forum participants.

On 16 October 2020, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Eurasian Forum was held in an online format based on the Zoom platform. The topic of the forum was dedicated to distance education in the context of the pandemic. The forum was attended by almost three hundred participants – 286 experts, including 38 foreign guests from 15 countries. Among international speakers there were 11 experts from accreditation agencies and universities from United Kingdom (QAA), Austria, Lithuania (SKVC), Estonia (EKKA), Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and other countries. The online format has allowed to attract participants from geographically distant countries like Egypt and Mauritius for the first time in the history of the Eurasian Forum.

*Participation of international experts in external review panels.* According to the [Rules for the Selection of Experts for the External Reviews of IQAA](#), expert panels have to include international experts during external reviews. Below, the statistics on the participation of international experts in external reviews of IQAA for five years is provided:

**2017** – 64 international experts (Azerbaijan, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom);

**2018** – 40 international experts (Azerbaijan, Belgium, Germany, Egypt, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia);

**2019** – 72 international experts (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Ukraine, Estonia);

**2020** – 57 international experts (Egypt, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Turkey);

**2021** – 62 international experts (Azerbaijan, Estonia, Germany, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine).

## **10. IQAA'S COMPLIANCE WITH ESG STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES (PART 3)**

### *Standard ESG 3.1: Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance*

#### **Standard:**

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

IQAA conducts external evaluations of higher education institutions and educational programmes, in accordance with the [mission, policy, vision, values and strategic priorities](#) of the Agency, on a regular basis.

The mission of IQAA is to help improve the quality of educational organisations, and increase their competitiveness at national and international levels through the development of a quality culture.

The new [Development Strategy for 2019-2023](#) clarified the policy, vision, values, targets and evaluation indicators of the Agency. To fulfill its mission and achieve target indicators, IQAA carries out the following activities:

- Institutional accreditation of higher education institutions;
- Initial institutional accreditation of higher education institutions;
- Programme accreditation of Bachelor's and Master's degrees;
- Initial accreditation of Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes;
- Accreditation of doctoral degree programmes;
- Initial accreditation of doctoral degree programmes;
- Institutional accreditation of medical higher education institutions;
- Accreditation of educational programmes of basic medical and pharmaceutical education (Bachelor's degree);
- Accreditation of medical and pharmaceutical education programmes education (Master's degree);
- Institutional accreditation of research institutes;
- Accreditation of educational programmes of research institutes in the field of postgraduate education (residency).

The main principles of conducting external reviews of higher education institutions are based on the voluntary basis of accreditation, independence, objectivity, integrity of accreditation procedures and collegiality in decision-making. All documents that regulate the procedures for external quality assurance, and the rules of interaction between higher education institutions and the Agency, are available [on the IQAA website](#).

Over the past year, the Agency has carried out a process of significant updating of all of its regulatory and methodological documents, including the Standards for institutional and programme accreditation of higher education institutions and the Guidelines for the preparation of self-assessment reports. In the process of updating the standards, the Agency interacted with all stakeholder groups – higher education institutions, review experts, students and employers, receiving feedback and suggestions.

IQAA ensures the participation of stakeholders in all external evaluation procedures of higher education institutions. Surveys of stakeholders, national and international review experts, students and employers who participate in external reviews, are carried out after each site visit on the basis of the Survey Monkey platform. Survey results are used to improve accreditation procedures.

Stakeholders, including national and international review experts, students and employers, public figures, members of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, participate in the management of the Agency at all levels: the Supervisory Board, the Accreditation Council, the Appeals Commission and the Complaints Commission. IQAA involves stakeholder parties in the work of the Expert Councils, as their participation is especially important when evaluating external review reports. Active exchange of views between stakeholders is carried out during international conferences and workshops organised by IQAA.

In accordance with recommendations of the ENQA review panel, the Agency amended the Agency's Charter and established the IQAA Supervisory Board in 2018. At the first meeting of the IQAA's Supervisory Board on 22 September 2018, the new [Strategy of Development for 2019-2023](#) was approved. The Strategy contains more precise target and quantitative indicators to determine the progress in the Agency's activities. Based on the Strategy of Development, annual plans of the Agency's activities and action plans of departments are developed. The Agency's annual and operational work plans are aimed at achieving specific objectives set out in the Strategy of Development.

### **Evidence:**

1. [Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education” \(English\)](#)
2. [Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On the Approval of the Rules for Recognition of Accreditation Bodies, Including Foreign Bodies, and the Formation of Registers of Recognised Accreditation Bodies, Accredited Educational Institutions, and Educational Programmes” \(English\)](#)
3. [Register of Recognised Accreditation Bodies \(English\)](#)
4. [The Strategy of Development for 2019-2023 \(English\)](#)
5. [IQAA's work plans \(Russian\)](#)
6. [IQAA's annual reports \(Russian\)](#)
7. [IQAA website](#)

### *Standard ESG 3.2: Official status*

**Standard:**

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

The non-governmental institution “The Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (IQAA)” has the status of a legal entity, and was officially registered by the Department of Justice of Astana of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2008. IQAA is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation created to improve the quality of education, and increase the competitiveness of educational institutions on national and international levels. In accordance with the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education”, Article 5 “Competence of the Authorised Body”, Paragraph 10, *“establishes the requirements and procedure for recognising accreditation bodies, including foreign ones, and forms registers of recognised accreditation bodies, accredited educational organisations and educational programmes”*. IQAA’s registration in the National Register 1 by the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science No. 112, from 14 March 2017, was reconfirmed for the period of five years.

Every five years, the Agency undergoes a national assessment of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan in accordance with the [Rules of Recognition of Accreditation Bodies](#) since its first inclusion in the National Register of Accreditation Bodies in 2012. The website of the Bologna Process and Academic Mobility Centre of the Ministry of Education and Science provides [the list of recognised accreditation agencies](#).

In 2019, IQAA was included in the Register of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic for the period of five years.

The Agency operates on the basis of the Charter, developed in accordance with the Civil Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On non-profit organisations” from 16 January 2001, the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education”, and other legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

In accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Charter, the Agency is managed by the Supervisory Board the Accreditation Council, and the President. The Supervisory Board, in accordance with [the Regulations on the Supervisory Board](#), is responsible for determining the main directions of the Agency's activities, approving the Agency's Strategy of Development, the Regulations on the Accreditation Council, and proposals for members of the Accreditation Council. The Supervisory Board discusses and approves the plans of activities and annual reports of the Agency.

The Accreditation Council is an elected representative public collegial body, whose activities are determined by the IQAA’s Charter and the [Regulations on the Accreditation Council](#). The functions of the Accreditation Council include reviewing self-assessment and external review reports, making decisions on accreditation of higher education institutions and educational programmes, approving the standards and criteria for institutional and programme accreditation.

Accredited educational institutions and educational programmes are included in the [National Register 2 of Accredited Educational Organisations](#) and the [National Register 3 of Accredited Educational Programmes](#) of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

It is the obligation of accreditation bodies included in the National Register 1 to provide timely information on accreditation of educational organisations and educational programmes. The data about institutional and programme accreditation of higher education institutions is sent to the Ministry of Education and Science after the meetings of the Accreditation Council.

In 2013, IQAA was additionally accredited by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan as a subject of scientific and/(or) scientific and technical activities. On 16 May 2016, the IQAA logo was registered by the Committee on Intellectual Property Rights of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

IQAA carries out external quality assurance activities based on the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education” and regulatory rules by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

### **Evidence:**

1. [Law of the Ministry of Education and Science “On Education”, Article 5 “Competence of authorised body in the field of education”, Paragraph 10 \(English\)](#)
2. [Order of the Minister of Education and Science “On approval of the Rules for Recognition of Accreditation Bodies, Including Foreign Bodies, and the Formation of Registers of Recognised Accreditation Bodies, Accredited Educational Organisations and Educational Programmes” \(English\)](#)
3. [National Register 2 of Accredited Educational Organisations \(English\)](#)
4. [National Register 3 of Accredited Educational Programme \(English\)](#)
5. [Regulations on the Supervisory Board \(English\)](#)
6. [Regulations on the Accreditation Council \(English\)](#)

### **Standard ESG 3.3: Independence**

#### **Standard:**

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

IQAA is an independent organisation, and has full autonomy in its activities in the field of ensuring the quality of education.

*Organisational independence.* The independence of the Agency from third parties, such as the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, educational organisations and other stakeholder organisations, is determined by the Charter and internal documents. The Agency performs its functions with organisational independence, and in carrying out its functions, the Agency has to guarantee the impartiality of its governing and administrative bodies, as well as of its employees. The Agency has developed the legal framework (Codes of Ethics) for all of these groups.

The Agency regularly provides information to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan regarding higher education institutions that have passed institutional and programme accreditation based on the Accreditation Council’s decisions for inclusion in [the National Register 2](#) and [the National Register 3](#). However, external quality assurance activities and legal status of IQAA are not related to and are not dependent on the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

*Operational independence.* IQAA has full operational independence and is fully responsible for its evaluation processes and the development of selection methods, and determines its procedures independently, without the involvement of third parties. In its activities, IQAA is guided by the methodology for assessing the quality of education, developed on the basis of the European Standards and Guidelines, taking into account best international practices.

The selection of experts for external reviews is carried out in accordance with the established procedures based on the IQAA review expert database, which is regularly updated after external audits are conducted. Review experts are appointed by the Agency on an autonomous basis, independent from higher education institutions and state bodies. If accreditation is carried out in a large city where several universities operate and compete with each other, review experts are appointed from higher education institutions in other cities to avoid a conflict of interest. The final composition of external review panels and the terms of external reviews of educational institutions are approved by the Order the Agency. IQAA ensures the independence of review experts through meticulously designed requirements for review experts. The [Code of Ethics](#) of external review experts stipulates that members of external review panels have to be independent in the exercise of their powers and not represent interests of the organisations in which they work/study, as well as not allow interference in their activities and/or lobbying interests of third party groups. In addition, the Code of Ethics declares the obligations of impartiality, ethical conduct, professionalism and confidentiality for external review experts, which are signed by experts before participation in external review audits.

An IQAA coordinator organises the work of external reviews panel throughout the external evaluation process, starting with seminars for members of external review panels, including organisational and logistical issues, such as arranging accommodation and board, and assisting in solving specific issues of experts related to their work. The coordinator is responsible for the completeness of content and compliance of external review reports with the Agency's requirements. However, only external experts are responsible for preparing external review reports, for providing evidence, analysis, comments and recommendations. A final external review report is sent by the chair of an external review panel to the IQAA coordinator, who sends the report to a higher education institution to check it for factual errors. In case of finding factual errors in an external review report, the coordinator sends the report back to the external review panel for revision. Before the meeting of the Accreditation Council takes place, external review reports are sent to the Expert Councils for reviewing external reports for compliance with the requirements and the preparation of conclusions. However, the Expert Councils cannot influence content and/or recommendations made in external review reports.

The reports of IQAA external review panels are registered in EQAR. As of June 2021, the DEQAR database by EQAR contains more than 1,700 reports from more than 70 higher education institutions uploaded by IQAA.

*Independence of official results.* The Accreditation Council of IQAA makes official decisions independently of third parties, educational organisations, or government agencies. The Agency's autonomy and independence ensures transparent and fair decision-making process.

The Accreditation Council, an independent collegial body that carries out its activities in accordance with the [Regulations on the Accreditation Council](#) is responsible for making decisions on the accreditation of higher education institutions and educational programmes. Decisions on accreditation are made by the Accreditation Council independently of educational organisations, the Ministry of Education and Science or other interested parties. All members of the Accreditation

Council sign the Code of Ethics, which sets the standards of behavior of members of the Accreditation Council in accordance with generally accepted moral and ethical standards. The selection of Accreditation Council members is based on the proposals of higher education institutions, who recommend vice-rectors, professors and students. In addition, the Alliance of Students of Kazakhstan offers its candidates to serve on the Accreditation Council. The Supervisory Board can offer its candidates for the Accreditation Council as well. The Agency forms the Commission that selects candidates for the Accreditation Council, the list of which is approved by the Order of the Agency. The Agency's President or staff members cannot be members of the Accreditation Council.

IQAA has full organisational and operational independence, as well as autonomy in making decisions. Moreover, the Agency is independent in designing quality assessment rules and procedures.

### **Evidence:**

1. [Rules for the Selection of Experts for External Reviews of IQAA \(Russian\)](#)
2. [Expert Code of Ethics \(English\)](#)
3. [IQAA Employee Code of Ethics \(Russian\)](#)
4. [Accreditation Council Member Code of Ethics \(Russian\)](#)
5. [Regulations on the Accreditation Council \(English\)](#)
6. [Strategy of Development for 2019-2023 \(English\)](#)
7. [Regulations on Decision-Making of the IQAA Accreditation Council Concerning Institutional Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions \(English\)](#)
8. [Regulations on Decision-Making of the IQAA Accreditation Council Concerning Programme Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions \(English\)](#)

### **Standard ESG 3.4: Thematic analysis**

#### **Standard:**

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

As an active actor in quality assurance and working closely with educational institutions in Kazakhstan and abroad, the Agency strives to utilise its research potential. The Agency produces analytical materials, thematic analyses and other materials based on research data and external evaluation reports. Thematic analyses aim to provide relevant information about quality assurance in higher education to stakeholders and society. The Agency's analytical and research activities consist of several areas.

*Thematic analyses based on external evaluation results.* Having access to the reports of external review panels based on external assessments in higher education institutions, the Agency analyses information in various areas in order to determine general development trends and challenges. For the reporting period, the Agency prepared and published seven thematic analyses for stakeholders and the public based on the results of analysis of review reports. IQAA thematic analyses are available on the official website in the [Publications](#).

*Thematic analyses based on feedback from external audit participants.* As an effective internal quality assessment mechanism, after each audit, IQAA conducts online surveys to determine the level of contentment of participants in external reviews. The procedures of conducting online

surveys are determined by the [Regulations on Surveys of Review Panels, Coordinators and Educational Institutions](#). Surveys results are reviewed and analysed, and on their basis, thematic analyses are produced. The results of the latest thematic analysis based on feedback from external reviews are presented in the [Standard ESG 3.6: Internal quality assurance and professional conduct](#)

*Thematic analyses based on the results of a focus group survey.* In 2020, the Agency conducted a study on the topic "[The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Higher Education in Kazakhstan](#)". The purpose of the study was to analyse the experience of the transition of higher education system in Kazakhstan to a new format of work during the pandemic in terms of teaching, learning and organisation of educational process. A total of 348 responses were received from two groups of respondents: from teaching and administrative staff (240 people), and from students (108 people). In total, 28 universities of Kazakhstan participated in the study. This contributes to informing the public about current issues in the higher education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan. This thematic analysis has been translated into English and is available on the official IQAA website.

Within the framework of the Erasmus+ [C3QA](#) project, a study based on surveys of doctoral students of six universities in Kazakhstan was conducted. The analysis of results was implemented by two partner universities of the project (Narikbayev KazGUU University and Auezov University). Based on the results of the study, IQAA developed [recommendations](#) for improving doctoral programmes, which were discussed at the national level and submitted for consideration to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The recommendations based on the study resulted in the introduction of amendments to the regulatory documents of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the field of doctoral studies with the aim of improving their quality.

*Bulletin on International Higher Education.* As part of its activities, the Agency regularly prepares the [Bulletins on International Higher Education](#). This work is carried out by the Department of Analysis and Quality of IQAA, which once a quarter, translates articles on most interesting and relevant topics of higher education. This work is carried out for educational institutions, quality assurance experts and stakeholders. The purpose of the Bulletin is to inform the public about the latest news and trends in higher education and quality assurance in the world.

**Evidence:**

1. [IQAA annual reports \(Russian\)](#)
2. [Bulletins on International Higher Education \(English\)](#)
3. [Regulations on surveys of review panels, coordinators and educational institutions \(English\)](#)
4. [Thematic analysis results of the transition period from state certification to independent accreditation of higher education institutions \(English\)](#)
5. [Thematic analysis of external review reports within the framework of institutional accreditation: key observations and recommendations \(Russian\)](#)
6. [Thematic analysis “Main comments and recommendations on specialised \(programme\) accreditation of educational programmes in the field of “Humanities, Law and Business” for 2016 \(Russian\)”](#)
7. [Thematic analysis “Main comments and recommendations on specialised \(programme\) accreditation of educational programmes in the field of “Education” for 2015-2016 \(Russian\)”](#)
8. [Thematic analysis “Main comments and recommendations on specialised \(programme\) accreditation of educational programmes in the field of “Technical Sciences and Technologies” for 2016 \(Russian\)”](#)
9. [Using institutional data from external review reports for 2019: On positive practices \(2020\) \(Russian\)](#)
10. [Using institutional data from external review reports for 2019: On remarks \(2020\) \(Russian\)](#)
11. [Using institutional data from external review reports for 2019: On areas for improvement \(2020\) \(Russian\)](#)
12. [Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education in Kazakhstan \(2021\)](#)
13. [Feedback analysis results for 2019 \(Russian\)](#)
14. [Feedback analysis results for 2020 \(Russian\)](#)

**Standard ESG 3.5: Resources****Standard:**

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

IQAA has sufficient human, material, technical and financial resources to realise its activities. The office of the Agency is located in the administrative centre of Nur-Sultan, the capital of Kazakhstan. The office is in the business centre “St Petersburg”. The total area of the office comprises 519 m<sup>2</sup>. The office has nine workrooms, including an archive and a conference room for up to 65 people, and two recreation areas for employees.

*Human resources.* The IQAA team consists of 20 full-time employees. All employees have sufficient level of qualifications and work experience in the field of higher education and quality assurance. Moreover, many staff members have academic degrees and titles, as well as MA (MSc), specialist and BA degrees. When recruiting new employees, the Agency is guided by the rules and requirements outlined in the [Guidelines on Internal Quality Assurance](#) and the job descriptions. The key requirements for the candidates are extensive work experience in higher education system (academic, administrative and/or managerial levels), an academic degree, and knowledge of Kazakh/English languages. The salaries of IQAA employees are competitive compared to employees of similar qualifications in the higher education system of Kazakhstan. Bonuses, in the amounts of monthly salaries, are provided to all employees based on performance twice a year,

before the New Year and vacations. To motivate employees for high performance results in work, employees are recognised through awards, as well as the letters of appreciation and certificates.

During quarantine measures imposed by the government from 16 March to 15 May 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, employees at the Agency did not work, since it was prohibited to leave housing premises except for grocery stores and pharmacies. No advance announcements could be made by the government regarding the state of emergency; therefore, the Agency could not plan and prepare for remote work of employees at home. Despite these challenges, the Agency was able to support all of its employees and provide full salaries to them, while the majority of employees in other sectors were on leave without pay and had to rely on limited government subsidies.

All employees of the Agency regularly take part in surveys on employee satisfaction with working conditions. IQAA pays significant attention to internal feedback and uses survey results to improve the Agency's performance.

The Agency pays great attention to the development of human resources. Favourable conditions have been created for employees for professional development through:

- Participation in IQAA seminars (monthly), at which the Agency's employees present their work;
- Participation of employees in the annual Eurasian Higher Education Leaders' Forum by the Nazarbayev University (registration fees are paid by the Agency);
- Participation in international conferences, forums and seminars organised by IQAA or universities of Kazakhstan;
- Participation in the forums and webinars of ENQA, EQAR, EUA and INQAAHE;
- Taking part in trainings (e.g. the ENQA Leadership Development Programme 2019-2020);
- Training of employees by leading experts from European accreditation agencies.

More details about the Agency's seminars and trainings organised to improve the qualifications of employees can be found in Appendix 3.

All employees of the Agency are responsible for quality and timely performance of their duties. Moreover, employees are required to comply with the moral and ethical standards documented in the IQAA [Code of Ethics](#) and build professional relationships based on the principles of integrity, courtesy, tact and mutual respect. In order to strengthen the corporate spirit of the team, the Agency periodically organises teambuilding and cultural events, such as visits to the Astana Opera or other venues.

IQAA has a strong social mission agenda. The Agency is passionate about taking part in social services and volunteering, including helping those in need. Since 2016, for the past five years, IQAA has been organising [charity events for elderly people and low-income families](#) based on the lists provided by the state social services in Nur-Sultan. The events take place in the wake of the Independence Day of the Republic of Kazakhstan (16 December) and before the New Year, in which all employees of the Agency take part. Packages with monthly food supplies, gifts and postcards are delivered to around 100 people every year. The budget for the yearly charity event exceeds 1,000,000 KZT. The event has received a very positive feedback so far. The recipients noted that not only the food supplies and gifts that mattered to them, but also the acts of kindness and attention provided to them. Taking into account charity activities of the Agency over the years,

the state social services of Nur-Sultan have sent an official letter of gratitude to the Agency in 2021.

During the accidental detonations of army supplies in the city of Arys in the Turkestan Region of Kazakhstan in June 2019, massive damage of housing in the city occurred. The Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan has created the national relief fund for help. IQAA contributed 1,000,000 KZT to the national relief fund. The Agency staff members voluntarily donated their one-day salaries as well. IQAA firmly believes that social and volunteer work is important for the development of the Agency and its staff.

*Technical support for IQAA activities.* The material and technical base of the Agency is updated on a regular basis. The Agency provides favourable conditions for employees to work. Each employee has approximately 8-10 m<sup>2</sup> of working area. All workspaces are equipped with desktop computers with high-speed fiber-optic Internet access. In addition, access to a Wi-Fi network is available throughout the Agency's premises. Each room in the office has a refrigerator, microwave oven and water dispenser.

The Agency has sufficient technical equipment, including the Polycom videoconference system, wide-screen TV, projection devices, and microphones for conducting online webinars and other events in the conference room. Subscription to software such as SurveyMonkey, Zoom, etc., is provided. Based on the results of an internal survey of employees, all employees are satisfied with the technical equipment levels of their workplaces.

*Financial resources.* The legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan does not allow financing of the accreditation agencies from the state budget. Fees for institutional and programme external reviews by higher education institutions, TVET institutions, and research institutes form the main source of the Agency's budget. External reviews are carried out on the basis of bilateral contracts between educational institutions and the Agency. The contracts have three stages of accreditation: preparations of self-assessment reports and their technical reviews, organising and carrying out of external reviews, and accreditation decisions by the Accreditation Council. Training seminars (if educational institutions request them) are carried out, technical reviews of self-assessment reports are conducted, external review panels and site visit programmes are formed, training of external review panels is provided, accommodation, board and travel during external reviews are organised, and the meetings of the Accreditation Council take place. Conducting post-accreditation monitoring is an additional source of financial revenues for the Agency; however, its share is not significant in the budget of the Agency.

Payment of expenses for purchase of equipment, furniture, and office supplies, communication expenses (postal services, telephone and internet communications), corporate and utility expenses, and other types of expenses, are made on the basis of contracts with suppliers and contractors.

Financial revenues provide sufficient resources of the Agency to conduct accreditation services.

### **Evidence:**

1. [Guidelines on Internal Quality Assurance \(Russian\)](#)
2. [Surveys of employees on the level of satisfaction with working conditions \(Russian\)](#)
3. [IQAA website](#)

**Standard ESG 3.6: Internal quality assurance and professional conduct****Standard:**

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

In accordance with its mission and values, IQAA adheres to the values of honesty, professionalism, accountability, commitment to quality and cooperation in all of its activities, including internal quality assurance. The agency is constantly working to improve internal quality assurance procedures, which serve as a platform for developing and promoting internal quality culture.

The organisation's internal quality assurance system uses the PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act) method, also known as the Deming cycle:

Plan – development of necessary documentation for quality assurance, for external reviews as well as internal documents;

Do – professional coordination and implementation of external reviews, and evaluation work within the Agency;

Check – analysis of feedback from external stakeholders and employees;

Act – improvement of quality assurance processes based on data from surveys and external reviews.

*Development of quality assurance documentation.* The Agency has developed a number of documents for internal quality assurance:

[Standards and criteria for internal quality assurance of institutional accreditation;](#)

[Standards and criteria for internal quality assurance of programme accreditation \(Bachelor's and Master's levels\);](#)

[Standards and criteria for internal quality assurance of doctoral degree programme accreditation;](#)

[Guidelines for the preparation of self-assessment reports of educational institutions for institutional accreditation;](#)

[Guidelines for the preparation of self-assessment reports of educational institutions for programme accreditation;](#)

[Rules for the selection of external experts for external reviews.](#)

[The Guidelines on internal quality assurance](#) were developed for IQAA employees based on the national legislation, and best European and international practices. The guidelines describe all elements of the IQAA internal quality assurance system. The Agency introduces minor amendments to the regulatory and methodological documents on an annual basis. In 2020, an editorial revision of all the documents was carried out, incorporating the proposals of higher educational institutions and review experts.

*Professional coordination, external reviews and assessment work.* To ensure consistency of external review procedures, the Agency appoints coordinators who form external review panels, conduct technical analysis of the educational institutions' self-assessment reports, participate in external reviews, and preview external review reports. For example, if an external review report is incomplete, the coordinator sends the external review report back to the chair of the external review panel for revision. The coordinator forwards the completed external review report to an

educational institution for review to check it for factual errors. After checking the external review report with the educational institution, the coordinator sends it to the Department for Reviewing External Review Reports and Post-Accreditation Monitoring. Then, the external review report is forwarded to one of the Expert Councils, depending on its profile. Members of the Expert Council conduct a thorough examination and review of the external review report, and prepare the conclusions on the external review report for the Accreditation Council. The coordinator receives the Expert Council's conclusions, and the reviewed report is then sent to the Technical Secretary of the Accreditation Council. The Technical Secretary sends the external review report to the Accreditation Council Chair and members to review 7-10 days before the start of the Accreditation Council meeting. In addition, the Technical Secretary distributes external review reports among Accreditation Council members for additional review of the reports. The coordinator presents the external review report at the meeting of the Accreditation Council and answers the questions of the Accreditation Council members. Finally, the Accreditation Council pays attention to each member's additional review of external review reports prior to voting on the accreditation status.

There are some changes that have occurred based on internal feedback mechanisms of the Agency. For example, earlier, external review documents were sent to members of the Accreditation Council, who, having reviewed the materials, made decisions on accreditation. However, two years ago, based on internal feedback from members of the Accreditation Council, the conclusion was reached that work of the Accreditation Council would be improved if each member of the Accreditation Council would be assigned individual external review documents of higher education institutions/educational programmes before meetings of the Accreditation Council. This approach was realised, and it has resulted in improving quality of work and decision-making of the Accreditation Council. On another front, it was determined that it was necessary to establish the Department for reviewing external review panel reports and post-accreditation monitoring to improve the quality of external review reports. The new department was created, and it has been carrying out reviews of external reports beside the Expert Councils, which has resulted in improving their quality.

*Conflict of interest prevention policy.* Absence of a conflict of interest is a prerequisite for participation in external reviews. The Agency ensures that members of external review panels are independent in implementing their activities, do not represent the interests of the organisations in which they work or study, and do not allow interference in their activities or lobbying in the interests of third parties.

To prevent conflicts of interest for involved parties:

- 1) The Agency checks review experts' CVs for potential conflicts of interest before approving external review panels;
- 2) Prior to external reviews, the Agency sends the list of external review panel members to educational institutions to check it with them to avoid potential conflicts of interest;
- 3) In addition to signing contracts with the Agency, external review experts have to sign the [Code of Ethics](#), which establishes ethical standards, deals with issues of a conflict of interest, requires honesty, objectivity, and competence during external reviews;
- 4) Members of the Accreditation Council have to exclude or disconnect themselves during external reviews of higher education institutions, with which they are or have been related recently, to avoid conflicts of interest.

IQAA organises online training for external review panels before external reviews in higher education institutions. Since Kazakhstan has a large territory, IQAA has purchased the state of the art Polycom videoconference platform long before the pandemic, to conduct training seminars for external reviewers online. Moreover, the Agency annually holds international conferences for external reviewers on conducting external reviews and writing external review reports by inviting leading national and European speakers.

Coordinators of the Agency are trained to carry out duties professionally. For example, new employees first take part in external reviews coordinated by experienced IQAA employees as trainees, and only after receiving proper training, they start coordinating external reviews on their own.

*Use of internal and external feedback mechanisms.* IQAA conducts surveys of external review participants after external assessments on a regular basis. In accordance with the [Regulations on surveys of review panels, coordinators and educational institutions](#), surveys are conducted through the Survey Monkey online questionnaire platform. Surveys are completed by members of external review panels, coordinators and representatives of educational institutions involved in external reviews.

The Agency ensures the consistency and uniformity of surveys, anonymity of respondents' participation, confidentiality of data. Respondents are informed about the purpose and significance of surveys. The data based on survey results is used to improve the Agency's internal quality assurance system.

*Improvement of quality assurance processes based on survey results.* The Analysis and Quality Department reviews and discusses survey results in order to make suggestions for improvement. The Agency introduces changes to methodological documents based on internal analysis of the employees' work annually, including the results of external evaluations, changes in national legislation, and individual suggestions from review experts and higher education institutions.

### **Evidence:**

- [1. Guidelines for the preparation of self-assessment reports of educational institutions for institutional accreditation \(Russian\)](#)
- [2. Guidelines for the preparation of self-assessment reports of educational institutions for programme accreditation \(Russian\)](#)
- [3. Rules for the selection of experts for the external review of IQAA \(Russian\)](#)
- [4. Guidelines on internal quality assurance \(Russian\)](#)

### **Standard ESG 3.7: Cyclical external review of agencies**

#### **Standard:**

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG

IQAA is committed to undergoing external reviews on a regular basis. The first external review of the Agency coordinated by ENQA was carried out in October 2016. The external review assessed the Agency's compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The peer review panel produced the external review report, in

which quality assurance activities of the Agency were evaluated, and recommendations for improvement were provided.

In February 2017, IQAA was granted membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). In June 2017, IQAA was listed on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). This review was an important achievement for IQAA, as the Agency was externally reviewed for the first time in its history.

In accordance with the recommendations in the external review report, the Agency submitted the follow-up report within two years from the date of the decision by ENQA Board. The review helped the Agency to improve its procedures and pay more attention to the systematisation of its activities. Some of the recommendations were implemented by the Agency immediately, while others took some time to carry out. [The Agency's report on the implementation of the recommendations](#) was sent to ENQA on 12 February 2019. The ENQA follow-up panel conducted the follow-up monitoring of IQAA of on 20 February 2019.

The monitoring programme included meetings with the President of the Agency, members of the Supervisory Board, the Accreditation Council, as well as key employees of the Agency. They discussed the follow-up activities of IQAA, results of the Agency's work, as well as prospects for its development.

The ENQA follow-up panel provided a high assessment of the Agency's follow-up activities within two years after being granted membership by the ENQA Board. At the meeting of the ENQA Board held on 25 April 2019, the ENQA follow-up panel's report was reviewed and visible progress in activities was noted.

IQAA applied for the renewal of membership in ENQA and listing on EQAR in November/December 2020. The external review is scheduled to take place in October 2021. IQAA is committed to undergoing external reviews of its activities on a regular basis.

External reviews provide valuable assessment and productive recommendations for improvement of the Agency. Besides, it is important for IQAA to undergo external assessment to maintain trust of higher education institutions and other groups of stakeholders.

**Evidence:**

[ENQA Review Follow-Up Report by the Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education \(IQAA\) \(English\)](#)

## **11. IQAA'S COMPLIANCE WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE (PART 2)**

### ***Standard ESG 2.1: Consideration of internal quality assurance***

**Standard**

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

IQAA believes that in accordance with the ESG standard 2.1, institutional quality assurance as well as the quality of educational programmes is the responsibility of higher education institutions. The main purpose of external reviews conducted by the Agency is to assure quality of higher education institutions, and provide feedback to enhance their activities and support them in their aims to move forward.

IQAA standards and criteria, accreditation procedures, developed on the basis of ESG 2015, stimulate development and continuous improvement of internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions, and assist in forming quality culture. The Agency strives to contribute to the improvement of activities of higher education institutions to support students in attaining relevant knowledge and skills required to succeed as qualified professionals as the modern world.

When preparing for an external assessment, educational organisations undergo the self-assessment process. In order to assist in this process, the Agency has prepared the guidelines for institutional and programme accreditation, taking into account the regulatory changes of the Ministry of Education and Science, which are periodically updated (the last update was in 2020):

- [Guidelines for the preparation of self-assessment reports of educational institutions for institutional accreditation;](#)
- [Guidelines for the preparation of self-assessment reports of educational institutions for programme accreditation \(Bachelor's and Master's\).](#)
- [Guidelines for the organisation and conduct of self-assessment for doctoral level educational programmes.](#)

The Agency provide these guidelines to higher education institutions for the preparation of self-assessment reports, which function as methodological manuals.

The tables 2 and 3 below list specific quality assurance processes covered in the IQAA standards and criteria for institutional and programme accreditation (bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels) of higher education institutions, including cross-border and medical accretation, are based on the standards and guidelines of the 1<sup>st</sup> part of ESG 2015.

**Table 2. Compliance of IQAA’s Standards with ESG Part 1**

ESG Part 1	IQAA standards and criteria reflecting ESG Part 1				
	Standards and criteria for institutional accreditation of higher and postgraduate education organisations	Standards and criteria for programme accreditation of higher and postgraduate education organisations	Standards and criteria for programme accreditation of educational programmes of the third level (doctoral studies)	Standards and criteria for cross-border institutional accreditation of higher and postgraduate education organisations	Standards and criteria for cross-border programme accreditation of higher and postgraduate education
1.1. Policy for quality assurance	Standard 1. Mission, strategic planning and quality assurance policy (1.1.3; 1.2.1; 1.3); Standard 3. Management and information management (3.1.3; 3.2.3); Standard 10. Public awareness (10.2.1)	Standard 1. Policy in the field of quality assurance of the educational programme and academic integrity; Standard 3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment (3.3.3)	Standard 1. Quality assurance policy and academic integrity	Standard 1. Mission, strategic planning and quality assurance policy (1.1.3; 1.2.1; 1.3); Standard 3. Management and information management (3.1.3; 3.2.3); Standard 10. Public awareness (10.2.1)	Standard 1. Policy in the field of quality assurance of the educational programme and academic integrity; Standard 3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment (3.3.3)
1.2 Design and approval of educational programmes	Standard 6. Educational programmes: their development, effectiveness, continuous monitoring and periodic evaluation	Standard 2. Development, approval of educational programmes and information management	Standard 2. The educational programme’s contents	Standard 6. Educational programmes: their development, effectiveness, continuous monitoring and periodic evaluation	Standard 2. Development, approval of educational programmes and information management
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	Standard 4. Student-centred learning, teaching and evaluation	Standard 3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment; Standard 2. Development, approval of educational programmes and information management (2.2.2; 2.2.11); Standard 4. Student admission, academic performance, recognition and certification (4.2.7)	Standard 2. Educational programme content (2.2.3); Standard 5. Effectiveness of the doctoral students’ support system	Standard 4. Student-centred learning, teaching and evaluation	Standard 3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment; Standard 2. Development, approval of educational programmes and information management (2.2.2; 2.2.11); Standard 4. Student admission, academic performance, recognition and certification (4.2.7)

1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	Standard 5. The admission of students, learning outcomes, recognition and qualification; Standard 4. Student-centred learning, teaching and evaluation (4.1.1; 4.4.1)	Standard 4. Student admission, academic performance, recognition and certification; Standard 3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment (3.3.1)	Standard 1. Quality assurance policy and academic integrity (1.3)	Standard 5. The admission of students, learning outcomes, recognition and qualification; Standard 4. Student-centred learning, teaching and evaluation (4.1.1; 4.4.1)	Standard 4. Student admission, academic performance, recognition and certification; Standard 3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment (3.3.1)
1.5 Teaching staff	Standard 7. Teaching staff; Standard 8. Research (8.1.1)	Standard 5. Teaching staff	Standard 3. Quality of the teaching staff	Standard 7. Teaching staff; Standard 8. Research (8.1.1)	Standard 5. Teaching staff
1.6 Learning resources and student support	Standard 9. Resources and student support services; Standard 8. Research (8.2.5)	Standard 6. Learning resources and student support	Standard 6. Resources	Standard 9. Resources and student support; Standard 8. Research (8.2.5)	Standard 6. Learning resources and student support
1.7 Information management	Standard 3. Management and information management; Standard 1. Mission, strategic planning and quality assurance policy (1.3.5)	Standard 2. Development, approval of educational programmes and information management; Standard 4. Student admission, academic performance, recognition and certification (4.2.10)	Standard 7. Effectiveness of educational programmes' learning outcomes and public awareness; Standard 1. Quality assurance policy and academic integrity (1.2.3);	Standard 3. Management and information management; Standard 1. Mission, strategic planning and quality assurance policy (1.3.5)	Standard 2. Development, approval of educational programmes and information management; Standard 4. Student admission, academic performance, recognition and certification (4.2.10)
1.8 Public information	Standard 10. Public awareness; Standard 1. Mission, strategic planning and quality assurance policy (1.3.5); Standard 3. Management and information management (3.2.8)	Standard 7. Public information	Standard 7. Effectiveness of educational programme's learning outcomes and public awareness; Standard 1. Quality assurance policy and academic integrity (1.2.8)	Standard 10. Public awareness; Standard 1. Mission, strategic planning and quality assurance policy (1.3.5); Standard 3. Management and information management (3.2.8)	Standard 7. Public information
1.9 Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of educational programmes	Standard 6. Educational programmes: their development, effectiveness, continuous monitoring and periodic evaluation; Standard 1. Mission, strategic planning and quality assurance policy (1.3.5); Standard 4. Student-centred	Standard 8. Continuous monitoring and periodic review of educational programmes; Standard 4. Student admission, academic performance,	Standard 8. Continuous monitoring and periodic review of educational programmes, periodic accreditation	Standard 6. Educational programmes: their development, effectiveness, continuous monitoring and periodic evaluation; Standard 1. Mission, strategic planning and quality assurance policy (1.3.5); Standard 4. Student-centred learning,	Standard 8. Continuous monitoring and periodic review of educational programmes; Standard 4. Student admission, academic performance,



	learning, teaching and evaluation (4.1.3); Standard 5. The admission of students, learning outcomes, recognition and qualification (5.1.2; 5.3); Standard 9. Resources and student support services (9.4.8); Standard 11. Periodic external quality assurance and follow-up procedures	recognition and certification (4.2.10)		teaching and evaluation (4.1.3); Standard 5. The admission of students, learning outcomes, recognition and qualification (5.1.2; 5.3); Standard 9. Resources and student support services (9.4.8); Standard 11. Periodic external quality assurance and follow-up procedures	recognition and certification (4.2.10)
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**Table 3. Compliance of IQAA’s Standards (in the area of medical education and additional education) with ESG Part 1**

ESG Part 1	IQAA standards and criteria reflecting ESG Part 1				
	Standards and criteria for institutional accreditation of medical education and science organisations	Standards and criteria for institutional accreditation of additional medical and pharmaceutical education	Standards and criteria for programme accreditation of basic medical and pharmaceutical education (Bachelor’s degree)	Standards and criteria for programme accreditation of medical and pharmaceutical education (Master’s degree)	Standards and criteria for programme accreditation of medical and pharmaceutical education (Residency)
1.1. Policy for quality assurance	Standard 1. Mission, strategic planning and quality assurance policy (1.6)	Standard 1. Mission and quality assurance policy (1.2)	Standard 1. Aims of educational programmes and quality assurance policy (1.5)	Standard 1. Aims of educational programmes and quality assurance policy (1.5)	Standard 1. Aims of educational programmes and quality assurance policy (1.1.2; 1.1.3)
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	Standard 2. Educational programmes: their development and effectiveness	Standard 2. Educational programmes (courses): their development and efficiency; Standard 3. Continuous monitoring and periodic evaluation (3.1)	Standard 2. Development and approval of educational programmes; Standard 4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification (4.6.1); Standard 7. Assessment of students’ progress and programme (7.2.2)	Standard 2. Development and approval of educational programmes; Standard 4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification (4.6.1); Standard 7. Assessment of students’ progress and programme (7.2.2)	Standard 2. Development and approval of educational programmes
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	Standard 3. Student-centred learning and teaching; Standard 7. Assessment of student academic performance and programmes (7.3); Standard 4. The admission of students, learning outcomes, recognition and qualification (4.6)	Standard 2. Educational programmes (courses): their development and efficiency (2.1.1; 2.3.1; 2.3.3); Standard 4. Physicians, admission and teaching (4.1.1)	Standard 3. Student-centred learning and teaching; Standard 1. Aims of educational programmes and quality assurance policy (1.1.4); Standard 2. Development and approval of educational programmes (2.1.8)	Standard 3. Student-centred learning and teaching; Standard 2. Development and approval of educational programmes (2.1.7)	Standard 3. Student-centred learning and teaching
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	Standard 4. The admission of students, learning outcomes, recognition and qualification; Standard 7. Assessment of student academic performance and programmes (7.3)	Standard 4. Physicians, admission and teaching; Standard 3. Continuous monitoring and periodic evaluation (3.4)	Standard 4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	Standard 4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	Standard 4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

1.5 Teaching staff	Standard 5. Faculty and teaching effectiveness	Standard 5. Teaching staff and effectiveness of teaching	Standard 5. Teaching staff	Standard 5. Teaching staff and personnel	Standard 5. Teaching staff
1.6 Learning resources and student support	Standard 6. Educational resources and student support; Standard 4. The admission of students, learning outcomes, recognition and qualification (4.5)	Standard 6. Physician resources and support services; Standard 4. Physicians, admission and teaching (4.1.7; 4.1.12)	Standard 6. Academic resources and student support; Standard 4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification (4.5; 4.6)	Standard 6. Academic resources and student support; Standard 4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification (4.5; 4.6)	Standard 6. Academic resources and student support; Standard 4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification (4.3; 4.4)
1.7 Information management	Standard 8. Management and information management	Standard 8. Management and information management	Standard 8. Management and information management (8.1)	Standard 8. Management and information management (8.1)	Standard 8. Management and information management (8.1)
1.8 Public information	Standard 1. Mission, strategic planning and quality assurance policy (1.7)	Standard 1. Mission and quality assurance policy (1.6)	Standard 8. Management and information management (8.2)	Standard 8. Management and information management (8.2)	Standard 8. Management and information management (8.2); Standard 1. Aims of educational programmes and quality assurance policy (1.5)
1.9 Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes	Standard 9. Continuous monitoring and periodic evaluation of educational programmes; periodic accreditation	Standard 9. Continuous monitoring and periodic evaluation; Standard 2. Educational programmes (courses) (2.4.4)	Standard 9. Continuous monitoring and periodic evaluation of educational programmes; periodic accreditation	Standard 7. Assessment of students' progress and programme	Standard 7. Assessment of students' progress and programme

**Evidence:**

1. [Guidelines for the preparation of self-assessment reports of educational institutions for institutional accreditation \(Russian\)](#)
2. [Guidelines for the preparation of self-assessment reports of educational institutions for programme accreditation \(Russian\)](#)
3. [Guidelines for the organisation and conduct of the self-assessment procedure of educational programmes of doctoral programmes \(Russian\)](#)
4. [Standards and criteria for institutional accreditation of higher education institutions](#)
5. [Standards and criteria for programme accreditation of higher education institutions \(English\)](#)
6. [Standards and criteria for accreditation of the third cycle \(doctoral studies\) educational programmes \(English\)](#)
7. [Standards and criteria for cross-border institutional accreditation \(English\)](#)
8. [Standards and criteria for cross-border programme accreditation \(English\)](#)
9. [Standards and criteria for institutional accreditation of medical education and science organisations \(English\)](#)
10. [Standards and criteria for institutional accreditation of additional medical and pharmaceutical education \(English\)](#)
11. [Standards and criteria for programme accreditation of medical and pharmaceutical education \(Bachelor's degree\) \(English\)](#)
12. [Standards and criteria for programme accreditation of medical and pharmaceutical education \(Master's degree\) \(English\)](#)
13. [Standards and criteria for programme accreditation of medical and pharmaceutical education \(Residency\) \(English\)](#)

***Standard ESG 2.2: Designing methodologies fit for purpose*****Standard:**

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

The updated standards and criteria for institutional and programme accreditation of IQAA were developed on the basis of ESG 2015, best international practices, national legislation and priorities of the state policy in the field of higher education in 2015. The inputs from stakeholders, including higher education institutions, students, and employers were taken into account. However, after 2015, there were many changes in the state policy of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Law “On Amendments and Additions to Some Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Expanding the Academic and Managerial Independence of Higher Educational Institutions” No. 171-IV from 4 July 2018, the new rules of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Regulating the Activities of Organisations of Higher and Postgraduate Education, in particular, the Classifier of Training of Cadres in the Fields in Higher and Postgraduate Education No. 569 from 2018, the Structure and Rules for the Development of Educational Programmes were adopted. In accordance with the new rules, higher education institutions were given the right to develop new educational programmes, which could be introduced into the educational process after receiving approval based on the expertise in the Bologna Centre and Academic Mobility of the MES RK. As a result, new educational programmes were developed by higher education institutions. In this regard, the Agency had introduced the practice of initial accreditation of educational programmes based

on the developed standards of accreditation, without participation of graduates and employers in external reviews, during the initial period of studies until the first graduation of students.

The Agency has made adjustments to the standards of institutional and programme accreditation twice for the past four years. The first changes were made in 2017 in response to proposals from ENQA to improve the criteria in the student-centred learning. On 30 June 2017, the meeting on proposed changes to the standards for institutional and programme accreditation was organised, which was attended by more than 40 participants: rectors, vice-rectors responsible for accreditation in universities, students and employers, who supported the changes. Additionally, an international conference on student-centred learning was organised by IQAA in 2017. Ultimately, the criteria for evaluating teaching and student-centred learning were strengthened.

The second change in the standards occurred on the basis of academic processes that took place in higher education institutions of Kazakhstan. In 2019, the public association “League of Academic Integrity” was formed, which united 12 universities of the country. The question of academic integrity began to be raised more often in the media, especially when it dealt with student works in the form of term papers and diploma theses for bachelor's, master's, and doctoral studies. Therefore, in 2020, the Agency organised surveys of university representatives, including heads of accreditation departments, and quality assurance experts, on academic integrity in the standards of institutional and programme accreditation. The need for reinforcement of academic integrity in the standards, since the criteria for academic integrity had already existed in the standards of IQAA, was discussed. The strengthening of academic integrity in the standards was widely supported; so, a separate standard “Ethics and academic integrity” was developed for institutional accreditation. As for the standards of programme accreditation, the first standard was expanded and renamed as “Policy in the field of quality assurance of educational programmes and academic integrity”. [The extensive research on academic integrity published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education \(QAA\) from the United Kingdom](#) helped to make improvements in this sphere.

The Agency has updated the post-accreditation monitoring procedure, excluding the analysis of the activities of educational institutions. The focus is now placed on the implementation of review panels' recommendations, as well as the description of changes that occurred during the period of accreditation by universities. Post-accreditation monitoring with a site visit to a higher education institution is conducted once after two to three years of accreditation in accordance with the Standard 11 of Institutional Accreditation and the Standard 8 of Programme Accreditation.

The Agency seeks to expand its quality assurance capacity in various ways, including by organising conferences and seminars for external experts and representatives of higher education institutions on a regular basis. Leading national and international quality assurance experts are invited to speak at these conferences. IQAA also translates and publishes books and brochures on quality assurance, and distributes them to representatives of higher education institutions, experts, students and employers.

In order to reduce the costs of accreditation for higher education institutions, if there are many educational programmes and they can be combined into one cluster based on their fields, the Agency combines several educational programmes into one cluster, but no more than four. Another possible option is to form a cluster of educational programmes, if the educational programme is the same, but is provided on different levels (bachelor's, master's and doctoral studies).

At the same time, the costs of institutional or programme accreditation are affected by the number of external review experts (academic national and international experts, students, and employers) taking part in external assessments, their service fees, services of interpreters (if necessary), accommodation,

board, and travel expenses, etc. The costs of external reviews are agreed with higher education institutions in advance in contracts.

When conducting an external audit, IQAA may organise a training workshop for higher education institutions' teams responsible for the preparation of self-assessment reports, if they request it. After receiving a self-assessment report, the Agency conducts technical examination of the report, informs higher education institutions on the composition of a review panel, to make sure there is no conflict of interest, agrees the time of the site visit and other technical details. To facilitate the preparation for external audits, the Agency has developed the guidelines, which are presented below in the Evidence section.

After external evaluations, the preparation of external review reports and decisions of the Accreditation Council, IQAA sends official letters to higher education institutions, informing them about the Accreditation Council's decisions along with the recommendations of review panels on institutional and/or programme accreditation.

**Evidence:**

1. [Guidelines for the preparation of self-assessment reports of educational institutions for institutional accreditation \(Russian\)](#)
2. [Guidelines for the preparation of self-assessment reports of educational institutions for programme accreditation \(Russian\)](#)
3. [Guidelines for the organisation and conduct of the self-assessment procedure of educational programmes of doctoral programmes \(Russian\)](#)
4. [Guidelines on the organisation and conduct of an external review \(audit\) for institutional and programme accreditation \(English\)](#)
5. [Guidelines for the organisation and conduct of a hybrid and distant external review \(audit\) in the frames of institutional and programme accreditation \(Russian\)](#)
6. [Requirements for the technical expertise on self-assessment reports of higher education institutions for institutional and programme accreditation \(Russian\)](#)
7. [Regulations on Expert Councils \(English\)](#)

**Standard ESG 2.3: Implementing processes**

**Standard:**

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include

- a self-assessment or equivalent;
- an external assessment normally including a site visit;
- a report resulting from the external assessment;
- a consistent follow-up.

The accreditation cycle procedures use published standards and requirements for quality assessment. IQAA applies consistent procedures with all educational organisations, regardless of their location, form of ownership (public/private) or legal form. The IQAA accreditation processes are robust and open to the public. The description of the procedure of accreditation and the regulatory documents of accreditation process can be found on the [IQAA website](#).

The IQAA implementation processes follow the generally accepted European practices based on the ESG 2015:

- A self-assessment of a higher education institution/educational programme;

- A technical analysis of the self-assessment report;
- An external visit (audit) by an independent review panel;
- Preparation of an external review report;
- Checking the external review report with a higher education institution for factual errors;
- A decision on accreditation by the Accreditation Council;
- Follow-up monitoring procedures.

IQAA provides methodological support to higher education institutions in the process of self-assessment and the composition of self-assessment reports. To this end, the Guidelines on the self-assessment process for institutional and programme accreditation have been developed, which set out and describe all stages of preparing self-assessment reports and detailed requirements for their writing, including appendices with statistical data.

The Agency has developed the [Guidelines on the organisation and conduct of an external review \(audit\) for institutional and programme accreditation](#), which is intended for a wide range of parties:

- Educational organisations to prepare for an external audit;
- Coordinators for the organisation of an external audit;
- Experts to review the requirements for an external audit and an external review report.

The IQAA accreditation standards, guidelines, and other regulatory documents clearly define the scope of usage, uniformity of procedures, and responsibilities of the parties involved.

After signing contracts for conducting external reviews with higher education institutions, IQAA appoints coordinators to work with them. Seminars on the preparation of self-assessment reports have been conducted online for the past two years, especially, considering that the majority of universities are undergoing accreditation for the second time. After the Agency receives self-assessment reports, the coordinators responsible conduct their technical analysis, and if necessary, they are sent back to educational institutions to update them.

Working in line with IQAA accreditation standards allows universities and educational programmes to demonstrate their mission, goals and objectives, quality assurance policies, ethical standards, principles of academic integrity, governance and information management. Accountability and improvement are the main objectives at the heart of all accreditation standards, as higher education institutions in the pursuit of achieving these goals, develop and move forward.

Site visits to higher education institutions, on average, last three days for institutional accreditation and two days for the programme accreditation. External reviews of medical higher education institutions are carried out in the same time frame. For medical research institutes, site visits for institutional and programme accreditation take up to two days due to their smaller sizes.

External review reports constitute the third element of quality assurance implementation processes, which objectively and critically analyse the implementation of internal quality assurance systems and other requirements. The requirements for external review reports are presented in the ESG [Standard ESG 2.6: Reporting](#).

Follow-up procedures are carried out on a systematic basis in accordance with the [Regulations on post-accreditation monitoring](#). The main focus of post-accreditation monitoring is on the implementation of review experts' recommendations. The post-accreditation monitoring reports of higher education institutions are submitted once a year to provide information about changes. Post-accreditation monitoring with one-day visits to higher education institutions are conducted once after two to three years of accreditation in accordance with the Standard 11 of Institutional Accreditation and Standard 8 of Accreditation of Educational Programmes.

**Evidence:**

1. [Guidelines for the preparation of self-assessment reports of educational institutions for institutional accreditation \(Russian\)](#)
2. [Guidelines for the preparation of self-assessment reports of educational institutions for programme accreditation \(Russian\)](#)
3. [Guidelines on the organisation and conduct of an external review \(audit\) for institutional and programme accreditation \(English\)](#)
4. [Requirements for the technical expertise for the self-assessment report of the university on institutional and programme accreditation \(Russian\)](#)
5. [Regulations on post-accreditation monitoring \(English\)](#)

**Standard ESG 2.4: Peer-review experts****Standard**

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

*Composition and requirements.* Professionalism and high competence of the review experts involved in external review processes ensures the quality of the accreditation procedures carried out. IQAA pays special attention to careful selection and regular training of peer review experts. The rules for the selection of external experts involved in external audits for institutional and programme accreditation are presented in the [Rules for the selection of experts for external reviews of IQAA](#). The selection of national and international experts, students, and employers is based on the IQAA expert database, which is regularly updated with recommendations from higher education institutions and the Alliance of Students of Kazakhstan. Students are attracted from final-year undergraduate, master's or doctoral levels. Employer representatives are recommended by regional branches of the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs "Atameken" and other professional associations. International experts are selected based on the recommendations of partner accreditation agencies. In addition, international experts can be nominated based on direct requests to rectorates, faculties, or departments of European universities. Potential candidates wishing to become IQAA external experts can submit applications on the Agency's website. The Agency assesses such experts on the basis of their CV's and prior experience training.

The IQAA coordinators have to ensure that prospective experts have appropriate qualifications to evaluate performance of higher education institutions or educational programmes. Depending on the accreditation format, the requirements for the composition, selection, and competencies of review panels are different. For example, for institutional accreditation, panels have to consist of at least five experts, without a coordinator, who have national and international experience, and knowledge necessary to carry out their duties. For a large university, panels have to consist of at least seven experts. Rectors/vice-rectors are appointed as chairs of panels for institutional accreditation, since experts with experience in the management of entire educational institutions are needed, who deal with developing strategic plans and all types of activities of educational institutions. As for international experts in institutional accreditation, experts at the level of rectors/vice-rectors or experts from foreign accreditation agencies with extensive experience are invited. In addition, national experts who are in charge of quality assurance departments in higher education institutions take part in institutional reviews. Teams must include student and employer representatives.

For programme accreditation, panels have to include at least four experts. Deans of faculties or heads of departments chair panels. Professors/associate professors, international experts, student and employer

representatives in the field of educational programmes are included in panels. The selection of panels is carried out by coordinators based on the IQAA expert database, and is checked by the head of the Department of accreditation of higher education institutions.

For international experts, the IQAA [website](#) contains materials on quality assurance of higher education in Kazakhstan, legislation on higher education and educational process in higher educational institutions of Kazakhstan to help them better understand national contexts when taking part in external reviews. International experts involved in the work of external review panels often represent the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Baltic countries and Eastern European countries. This is due to the fact that self-assessment reports are mainly submitted in Russian by educational institutions. When experts from Western Europe and other regions of the world participate in external reviews, they are provided with services of interpreters to participate in reviews fully. Coordinators provide informational support to international experts, hire interpreters for reviews and helps with other logistical issues.

After each audit, surveys on the level of satisfaction of participants with external evaluation procedures are conducted. For more information about surveys and their results, see [Standard ESG 3.6: Internal quality assurance and professional conduct](#). The Database and IT Department has recently developed an additional function for evaluating experts on several criteria after audits are completed. This system creates a ranking of experts based on evaluations of coordinators and helps in the selection of experts for future audits.

*Training of review panels.* Before conducting external audits, the Agency's coordinators send self-assessment reports to each panel member by email, the [Code of Ethics](#) for experts, a site visit programme, the Standards and Criteria of institutional/programme accreditation, information about panel composition, the [Guidelines on the organisation and conduct of an external review \(audit\) for institutional and programme accreditation](#), and conducts online training of review panels prior to site visits. The online form of training has been used for more than six years, primarily because of vast distances between cities in Kazakhstan. During preliminary trainings of experts, coordinators discuss audit programmes, the Code of Ethics, requesting of additional documents, questions of experts on self-assessment reports and other relevant information with experts. In addition, on the first day before the start of external reviews in educational institutions, coordinators conduct an additional briefing for external experts.

Peer review experts are invited to participate in international conferences and trainings organised by the Agency. Moreover, in order to provide additional support to students and employers, training seminars on external reviews specifically for students and employers have been organised.

The training of experts is designed to ensure consistent interpretation and application of the IQAA standards and other regulatory documents by expert groups. The Agency provides informational and methodological support to external evaluation experts at all stages of the accreditation cycle.

**Evidence:**

1. [Rules for the selection of experts for the external review of IQAA \(rus\)](#)
2. [Code of Ethics for external experts \(English\)](#)
3. [Guidelines on the organisation and conduct of an external review \(audit\) for institutional and programme accreditation \(English\)](#)

## Standard ESG 2.5: Criteria for outcomes

### Standard

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

*Evaluation criteria.* To guarantee fairness and transparency of reviews, all decisions on accreditation of higher education institutions organisations and educational programmes are based on clearly defined criteria that are applied consistently.

Based on self-assessment reports, documents of the higher education institution, interviews with management, teaching staff and employees, students, graduates and employers, visual reviews, external review panels draw conclusions about higher education institutions' and/or educational programmes' degree of compliance with the standards and criteria of IQAA. Quality standards and criteria for outcomes (recommendations, judgments and official decisions) for all IQAA's accreditation activities constitute an integral part of the Agency's regulatory framework. In addition, IQAA offers sample recommendations for meeting the criteria of the standards, which can be used by experts.

Each criterion is evaluated based on the IQAA ranking scale: full compliance, significant compliance, partial compliance, and non-compliance. Before audits, experts study the [Guidelines for grouping the remarks made during external reviews](#) in the frames of institutional and/or programme accreditation. The standards contain a set of criteria that structure evaluation process and ensure consistency of decision-making, even if assessments are made by different external review panels. For example, external experts have to clearly understand differences between “remarks” and “area for improvement”, since assessments provided in external review reports by external review panels play a crucial role when the Accreditation Council makes decisions on accreditation.

Compliance with the standards and criteria form the basis for external evaluations and decision-making on accreditation. To ensure consistent application of the evaluation criteria, all experts must participate in training sessions prior to external audits conducted by the coordinators. IQAA coordinators review draft external reports, and in the cases of insufficient evidence and analysis, requires experts to supplement or refine them. However, coordinators do not interfere with the assessments themselves. The IQAA then sends external review reports to higher education institutions to check them for factual errors, within a certain period of time, according to the rules. The Expert Councils, together with the coordinators, review external review reports, and prepare the conclusions for the Accreditation Council.

*Decision-making criteria.* When making decisions, the Accreditation Council uses self-assessment reports, external review reports, and additional materials provided at the request of the Accreditation Council. In order to make fair decisions, the Accreditation Council members carefully analyse review reports and other documents. All members of the Accreditation Council receive self-assessment and external review reports, as well as the Expert Councils' conclusions in advance (7-10 days) before the meeting of the Council. The coordinators of review panels make presentations about external review reports of review panels at the Accreditation Council's meetings. Additionally, each of the members of the Accreditation Council is appointed as a reviewer for a more detailed analysis of submitted documents based on an external review. The Accreditation Council interprets external review reports consistently and makes decisions based on the Regulations on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council. In the case of a positive decision, the IQAA awards educational institutions and/or educational programmes with the certificates of accreditation and sends the information to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for inclusion in the National Registers

2 and/or 3.

Currently, higher education institutions and educational programmes are accredited by IQAA for two years, five years and seven years. The Accreditation Council has made changes to the terms of awarding accreditation status: the status of conditional accreditation was canceled; instead, the status of accreditation for two years was introduced for higher education institutions or educational programmes that do not meet full or significant compliance with most standards. This was done because it was concluded that a full review would be necessary to make sure that sufficient progress by higher education institutions or educational programmes has been accomplished.

The accreditation status for educational institutions or educational programmes for five years has remained unchanged. In addition, now there is a possibility to receive institutional and/or programme accreditation for seven years, in the case of outstanding achievements of higher education institutions and/or educational programmes.

Recently, the role of the Accreditation Council in the decision-making process has been significantly strengthened (Protocol of the IQAA Accreditation Council meeting from 26 December 2020). If significant breaches of national laws and accreditation standards are identified, the Accreditation Council may make decisions not based on quantitative indicators in the Regulations on making decisions on institutional/program accreditation. The Accreditation Council consists of representatives of higher education institutions, an international expert, students and employers.

#### **Evidence:**

1. [Guidelines for grouping the remarks made during external reviews \(Russian\)](#)
2. [Regulations on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning institutional accreditation of higher education institutions \(English\)](#)
3. [Regulations on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning programme accreditation of higher education institutions \(English\)](#)
4. [Regulations on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning institutional accreditation of medical education and science organisations \(research institutes\) \(Russian\)](#)
5. [Short version of standards and criteria for institutional accreditation of higher education institutions \(English\)](#)
6. [Short version of standards and criteria for programme accreditation of higher education institutions \(English\)](#)

#### **Standard ESG 2.6: Reporting**

##### **Standard**

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

The reports of external review panels have a clear and concise structure, and clearly demonstrate the compliance/non-compliance of higher education institutions/educational programmes with the standards of institutional and/or programme accreditation. IQAA provides experts with [Guidelines on the organisation and conduct of an external review \(audit\) for institutional and programme accreditation](#) and the Templates for writing reports on institutional and programme accreditation. Expert panel chairs are responsible for the composition of reports on institutional and programme accreditation. Expert

panel chairs distribute the standards for review among experts, according with which they must prepare reports.

Each of the members of an expert panel is responsible for drawing up a separate part of the report, which is then processed by the whole team, taking into account the views of each expert. If universities do not comply with the certain criteria of institutional and/or programme accreditation standards, the reports have to clearly indicate the areas that need improvement and ways to fix these inconsistencies. The reports have to be professional, avoid subjectivity, and be coherent, making sure they do not consist of separate parts that are not related in content and form to each other. Reports have to demonstrate the results of joint work of review panels. Final versions of external reports are agreed upon by review panels and submitted to IQAA coordinators. If external reports do not meet certain requirements, coordinators can return them to review panels for revision.

The Agency sends external review reports to higher education institutions by email to check them for factual errors. If educational institutions do not provide comments on external reports within three-five days, the Agency has the right to consider that they no objections to them. If universities provide comments/objections on external reports, chairs of review panels, in consultation with other members of the panel, make revisions or provide substantiated rebuttals to the comments. Chairs of review panels then submit final versions of external reports to coordinators by email.

IQAA adheres to the policy of openness and transparency, and regardless of the nature of accreditation decisions by the Accreditation Council, [publishes all external review reports on its website](#). The procedure for posting external reports is reflected in the Guidelines on the organisation and conduct of external reviews (audits) for institutional and programme accreditation. The Agency's website is regularly updated and new reports are published. Along with external review reports, decisions of the Accreditation Council are published on the website as well. The website provides possibility of an extended search to find necessary information, which allows to customise search queries by the names of higher educational institutions or educational programmes, and the year of accreditation, for the published reports.

Since 2017, IQAA has been uploading reports to the DEQAR database of EQAR. Since February 2020, the Agency has been a participant in the DEQAR Connect project, during the implementation of which, the Database and IT Department of IQAA developed an internal system for automatically uploading reports to the DEQAR database using the Application Programming Interface (API), both individually and wholesale. The system can synchronise documents with the data provided in DEQAR. Participation in this project is important for the Agency, as it provides opportunity to publish external review reports on the unified database in the European Higher Education Area, and it promotes openness and transparency of external review results.

**Evidence:**

[Guidelines on the organisation and conduct of an external review \(audit\) for institutional and programme accreditation \(English\)](#)

[Guidelines for grouping the remarks made during the external review \(Russian\)](#)

[Report template in the frames of institutional accreditation \(English\)](#)

[Report template in the frames of programme accreditation \(English\)](#)

[Report template in the frames of programme accreditation of the third cycle programmes \(English\)](#)

## *Standard ESG 2.7: Complaints and appeals*

### **Standard**

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

Higher education institutions have the right to express their disagreement or objections with external reviews and/or decisions of the Accreditation Council by filing complaints and/or appeals.

There are two bodies in the organisational structure of the Agency: the Complaints Commission and the Appeals Commission. Each complaint or appeal by a higher education institution goes through a thorough review and decision-making process.

The Complaints Commission deals with issues of disagreement or dissatisfaction of educational organisations undergoing accreditation with the actions or code of conduct of external review panel members or coordinators of the Agency. The [Complaints Commission](#) consists of representatives of the academic community of Kazakhstan, and can include up to five representatives. To convene a meeting of the Complaints Commission, the presence of three members is sufficient. A chair of the Complaints Commission is chosen by members of the Commission before the meeting to consider a complaint.

Higher education institutions can file complaints by email or fill out special feedback forms on the official website of the Agency. Reviews of complaints by educational institutions allow to identify mistakes/violations committed during external audits, and offer recommendations and solutions for mending them. Reviews of complaints allow to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of external review procedures, maintain integrity and responsibility of external review experts and coordinators. The complaints procedure is regulated by the [Regulations on the procedure of considering complaints](#).

The Appeals Commission considers appeals of higher education institutions against decisions on institutional or programme accreditation by the Accreditation Council. The work of the Appeals Commission is implemented based on the [Regulations on the Appeals Commission and the Appeals Procedure](#). The Appeals Commission consists of five representatives of the academic community of Kazakhstan, four of whom are professors in the field of jurisprudence. To convene the meeting of the Appeals Commission, the presence of three members is sufficient. A chair of the Appeals Commission is chosen by members themselves immediately before the meetings to consider an appeal.

The Appeals Commission considers appeals of educational institutions in written form, as official letters signed by rectors/presidents of higher education institutions. An appeals application is registered in the journal of correspondence, and is sent to the Secretary of the Appeals Commission, who then sends the documents on an appeal to the Chair of the Appeals Commission. If an appeal contains issues that fall under the complaints procedure, the Appeals Commission redirects them to the Complaints Commission for consideration.

During the reporting period, the Agency received one appeal from a university in 2020 that was conditionally accredited (protocol of the Accreditation Council meeting from 29 April 2018) and then not accredited after a repeated external review (protocol of the Accreditation Council meeting from 07 November 2020). The Appeals Commission carefully considered the external review report, the protocol of the meeting of the Accreditation Council, and concluded that the review panel functioned correctly, so, the university was refused the appeal application (protocol of the Appeals Commission from 12 December 2020).

**Evidence:**

1. [Regulations on the Procedure of Considering Complaints \(English\)](#)
2. [Regulations on the Appeals Commission and the Appeal Procedure \(English\)](#)

## **12. INFORMATION AND OPINIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS**

The main stakeholders of the Agency are educational institutions, students and employers. Stakeholder views are an important element in the Agency's evaluation and improvement processes, as they form an essential part of continuous improvement process.

IQAA external audit processes are conducted with the mandatory participation of students and employers. Moreover, after each external audit, information is collected via a feedback form, through which students and employers share their impressions of assessments, and provide information on the level of contentment of external review procedures.

Stakeholders provide feedback on updating the IQAA Standards and Accreditation Criteria. In 2017, the criteria for standards on student-centred learning were strengthened. In 2020, an additional standard on academic integrity and ethics for institutional accreditation was introduced based on the suggestions of universities and Standard 1 for programme accreditation was expanded, in which, the issues of academic integrity are addressed along with quality assurance policy of the Agency.

Stakeholders are actively involved in internal processes of the Agency, and they are represented at all levels of the Agency's management, including the Supervisory Board, Accreditation Council, Expert Councils, and the Complaints and Appeal Commissions. Stakeholders are actively involved in Agency conferences and trainings as speakers, moderators and participants.

Information about accredited educational institutions, external review reports, standards and guidelines are presented on the official website of the Agency. IQAA regularly updates information about its activities on social networks such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. IQAA promotes an open and active dialogue with stakeholders, who can offer suggestions, ask questions or provide feedback on accreditation on social media platforms.

Any interested party can freely contact the Agency through the official website, telephone, and email, and receive timely answers and feedback to questions raised. IQAA ensures that reliable information is published in social media accounts. The Agency publishes information about its activities in order to meet the needs of stakeholder parties, and build transparent relationships with the academic community and the public.

The self-assessment report was sent for comments and suggestions to international experts who are involved in the work of the Agency and the Supervisory Board, to external review experts, to the members of the Supervisory Board, the Accreditation Council and the Complaints and Appeals Committees. There was positive feedback, including comments and suggestions, which were taken into account in the self-assessment report.

## **13. MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS REVIEW AND IQAA'S RESULTING FOLLOW-UP**

The table shows the recommendations of the previous ENQA review and the measures undertaken by the IQAA in response.

## **ESG PART 3: STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES**

### **ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE**

#### **ENQA Recommendation**

Amend its Statutes to explicitly assign the responsibility for overseeing the implementation of its strategy to a governing body, and put in place formal mechanisms for translating its strategic objectives into its daily activities and for measuring progress towards its strategic objectives.

#### **IQAA's implementation of the recommendation**

Based on the recommendation from the ENQA review panel, IQAA had made amendments in its Charter, and established the Supervisory Board. The Supervisory Board of IQAA is responsible for determining the Agency's main fields of activities, approving the Agency's Strategy of Development, long-term plans of activities and annual reports of the Agency's activities.

Based on the Regulations of the Supervisory Board of IQAA, it convenes twice a year. The Supervisory Board has five members, and it includes one international expert. The meetings of the Supervisory Board take place since 2018. In accordance with the Regulation on the IQAA Supervisory Board, it meets once or twice an a year; however, in practice, the Agency maintains regular contact with the Chair of the Supervisory Board, who is regularly informed about the activities of the Agency. The Accreditation Council has retained its main duties, to examine self-assessment and peer review reports, and make decisions on the accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes.

The Agency's strategy was revised, and the new Strategy of Development for 2019-2023 was adopted, which defines more precisely quantitative indicators to determine progress in the Agency's activities. On the basis of the Strategy of Development, annual plans of the Agency's activities and action plans for the Departments of the Agency are prepared.

### **ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

#### **ENQA Recommendation**

Analyse the material available in its accreditation review reports and produce on this basis (a) thematic analysis(es) to support further development of quality assurance in higher education institutions and policy development at national level.

#### **IQAA's implementation of the recommendation**

IQAA regularly publishes thematic analyses in different fields, which are intended for the improvement of quality assurance in higher education institutions and national policy development. Based on the recommendation of the ENQA review panel, IQAA started publishing thematic analyses on the basis of external review reports since 2016. All thematic analyses and other publications are available [on the website of IQAA](#).

### **ESG 3.5 RESOURCES**

#### **ENQA Recommendation**

Consider allocating some resources specifically for English language training of staff in the coming years.

#### **IQAA's implementation of the recommendation**

Since the level of English language proficiency was different among the staff members of the Agency, it was deemed that organising group lessons of English language would not be effective, and it was agreed that employees would work on improving their English language on an individual basis. Besides, many staff members do not require fluency in English to perform their daily duties. On the other hand,

for example, the Analysis and Quality Department of IQAA is frequently tasked with studying and analysing best international practices in quality assurance of higher education. Therefore, staff members of the Analysis and Quality department are fluent in English.

### **ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT**

#### **ENQA Recommendation**

Put in place, as part of its internal quality assurance system, a formal mechanism for regular self-analysis and self-assessment and use of findings from the process for institutional enhancement.

#### **IQAA's implementation of the recommendation**

The Agency has instituted a formal mechanism for regular self-analysis and self-assessment, and the use of findings from the process for institutional enhancement on an annual basis. IQAA had organised meetings and involved external stakeholders for this purpose as well. This mechanism has helped to improve the effectiveness of the Agency's work and resulted in appropriate changes and adjustments in the Agency's standards and regulations. The system of internal quality assurance is based on the Mission and Aims of the Agency, and it is outlined in the IQAA Guidelines on Internal Quality Assurance.

## **ESG PART 2: STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**

### **ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**

#### **ENQA Recommendation**

(1) Focus more strongly on the effectiveness of internal quality assurance in its accreditation methodology, while allowing for the varying progress made by institutions in the development of their internal quality assurance systems; (2) refine its accreditation standards concerning student-centred learning (corresponding to ESG 1.3) so that they give more consideration to how the concept is translated into pedagogical approaches and assessment practices; and (3) give more consideration to the primary responsibility of institutions for quality in its interpretation of ESG 1.9.

#### **IQAA's implementation of the recommendation**

The Agency revised the standards of institutional accreditation to put more focus on effectiveness and transparency of internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions (a. 1.3.1 (Standards of Institutional Accreditation)). The Agency revised the criteria of the standards of institutional and programme accreditation on student-centred learning, for example, the Agency strengthened criteria for student-centred learning in the fields of teaching methods and forms, expected learning outcomes and their assessment (a. 3.4.3, a. 3.4.11 (Standards of Institutional Accreditation), a. 3.4.1, a. 3.4.6 (Standards of Programme Accreditation)).

The standards place more emphasis on the effectiveness of internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions. The Agency has further strengthened this parameter in the Standards and Criteria, Standard 1, on programme accreditation. In the standards, along with the criterion 1.2.9, which deals with systematic monitoring, performance assessment and other issues, an additional criterion has been introduced: 1.2.10 Stakeholders are periodically informed by the university about assessment of the effectiveness of internal quality assurance system of the educational programme in order to improve it. In the institutional accreditation standards, this parameter is reflected in the Standard 1, the criteria 1.3.1 and 1.3.3.

The Agency has put emphasis on conducting conferences and trainings to contribute to the development of student-centred learning in Kazakhstan. On 5 October 2017, the Agency organised the international conference "Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Evaluation: Principles and Technologies" for external experts and representatives of higher education institutions. During the conference, the main

principles of student-centered teaching, the development of curricula based on student-centered teaching, the possibilities of interactive technologies in the student-centered learning system and other issues were discussed. In addition, the Agency had translated, published and distributed among higher education institutions of Kazakhstan the books " Student-Centred Learning Toolkit for Students, Staff and Higher Education Institutions" (Brussels 2010) and "Student-Centred Learning: An Insight Into Theory and Practice" (Bucharest 2010).

On 6 October 2017, the training "Development of Study Programmes based on Competence, Student-Centred Learning and Quality Assurance" was organised. The focus of the training was on student-centred learning algorithms in the development of study programmes in line with intended learning outcomes and the selection of effective monitoring tools. This master class was conducted by Lucas Bischof, international expert in higher education (Germany), advisor and research fellow at the Higher School of Economics (Moscow). The master class was attended by 35 people who are heads of methodological services, heads of departments, teachers of universities and research institutes. During the training, the main attention was paid to student-centered learning algorithms in the development of curricula in accordance with the intended learning outcomes and the choice of effective monitoring tools.

The Agency upgraded questionnaires for external reviews, which now include questions on student-centred learning for students and academic staff of universities. These questionnaires are used by external experts in analysing the criteria on student-centred learning.

Several training webinars were organised for students participating in external assessments in recent years and a new version of the handbook for students was prepared. The upgraded version was supplemented with new useful information about accreditation process and guidelines for students on the participation in external reviews. The handbook describes the components of student-centred learning and the ways of its implementation.

Student representatives are actively involved in the annual IQAA events such as the Eurasian Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the International Conference for Training of Experts.

IQAA has outlined the effectiveness of internal quality assurance systems being the responsibility of higher education institutions within a post-accreditation monitoring process (a. 10.2.1 (Standards of Institutional Accreditation), a. 8.2.10 (Standards of Programme Accreditation)).

During the previous 2016 ENQA review, a recommendation was made to improve its accreditation standards for student-centered learning (in line with ESG 1.3). Consequently, by revising its standards, the Agency has placed particular emphasis on the "Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment" standard and criteria in the areas of teaching methods and forms, expected learning outcomes and their assessment.

Criteria for student-centered learning and teaching and student learning outcomes have been added to the Institutional Accreditation Standards. In particular, sub-clauses 4.2.3, 4.3.7, 4.4.8 and 4.4.12 are included regarding the planning and implementation of expected learning outcomes, educating teachers in student-centered learning technologies and student satisfaction with the quality of educational services.

In the Programme Accreditation Standards, special emphasis was placed on the criteria for assessing teaching and learning and learning outcomes (paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3, respectively). The improved criteria of the standard ensure that the teaching and learning process supports active student participation

in the learning process, flexibility of teaching and learning process, tailoring the student workload based on individual ability and participation of students in all internal and external quality assurance processes.

## **ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE**

### **ENQA Recommendation**

In order to make its external quality assurance methodology better fit for purpose, (1) phase out its preliminary review process; and (2) redesign its post-accreditation monitoring process before the second cycle of accreditation reviews, so that it focuses on follow-up on action taken by institutions in response to findings from accreditation reviews (rather than on progress they make towards meeting its accreditation standards, with a view to facilitating reaccreditation); and to balance this, (3) expand its QA capacity building activities for institutions, in particular on IQA, so that they are better prepared to undergo an accreditation review and take primary responsibility for quality and its assurance; put in place a mechanism for regular review of its methodology, including arrangements for regular collection of feedback on its fitness for purpose from its external stakeholders.

### **IQAA's implementation of the recommendation**

It was agreed that a preliminary review process for institutional accreditation was redundant and it was phased out by the Agency in 2016. The preliminary review was introduced when an accreditation process had just started in Kazakhstan, and maybe, it was useful for accreditation of higher education institutions back then, but in accordance with the recommendation of the ENQA review panel, it was deemed no longer necessary and removed from the accreditation process.

The post-accreditation monitoring was redesigned and analysis of educational institutions' activities was removed from it. The focus on the fulfilment of recommendations based on peer review reports was retained. Reports by higher education institutions are provided once a year to provide information on changes in them. Post-accreditation monitoring audits are carried out once after two years of accreditation in accordance with the Standard 10 of Institutional Accreditation and the Standard 8 of Programme Accreditation.

The Agency seeks to expand QA capacity in a number of ways, including by organising conferences and workshops for external experts and representatives of higher education institutions on a regular basis. Leading experts from Kazakhstan and the world are invited to present at these conferences. IQAA also translates and publishes books and brochures on QA topics from time to time.

For example, on 6 April 2018, the Agency organised the international conference "Management of Internal Quality Assurance Systems in Higher Education" with the participation of Prof. Lucien Bollaert as a key speaker, one of leading international experts on internal quality assurance in higher education. The Agency was granted the right from Prof. Lucien Bollaert and EURASHE to translate and publish a limited issue of the book of "A Manual for Internal Quality Assurance in Higher Education" for the purpose of the conference, which was distributed among more than one hundred representatives of higher education institutions in Kazakhstan.

The Agency has upgraded mechanisms for regular self-analysis and collecting feedback from external stakeholders. Since 2015, the Agency sends surveys to gather external feedback from external experts who participate in peer reviews.

Besides, the Agency now also sends letters to higher education institutions, which request proposals for changes in the standards of institutional and programme accreditation on an annual basis. For example, on 30 June 2017, the meeting on the subject of proposed changes in the IQAA's standards and criteria of institutional and programme accreditation was organised. The meeting was attended by more than 40 participants: rectors, vicerectors and representatives of higher education institutions responsible for quality assurance as well as chiefs of IQAA's Accreditation Committees.

## ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

### ENQA Recommendation

For greater clarity, amend its regulations on programme accreditation so that they refer more explicitly to the compulsory status of post-accreditation monitoring and define more precisely its scope.

### IQAA's implementation of the recommendation

IQAA amended the Standard 8 of Programme Accreditation (a. 8.2.10., a. 8.2.11), which outlines the compulsory status of post-accreditation monitoring for study programmes. The post-accreditation monitoring of study programmes is designed to implement recommendations based on external review reports of study programmes.

## ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

### ENQA Recommendation

Consider providing international experts with additional training and/or materials on the national higher education and quality assurance context.

### IQAA's implementation of the recommendation

The information about higher education in Kazakhstan is available to international experts in the form of a presentation. The purpose of the presentation is to provide brief information about the higher education system in Kazakhstan as well as about quality assurance of higher education in Kazakhstan, legislation and study process in higher education institutions of Kazakhstan. This information allows international experts to better understand higher education in Kazakhstan and participate more effectively in external reviews of higher education institutions and study programmes in Kazakhstan.

## ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

### ENQA Recommendation

(1) Amend its Provision on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning institutional accreditation to explicitly authorise the Council to adjust algorithm based ratings in justified cases (as is currently the case for programme accreditation); and (2) revise its guidelines for experts so that they define more precisely minimum requirements to be fulfilled or acceptable shortcomings for each of the four levels of compliance with its accreditation standards.

### IQAA's implementation of the recommendation

The Agency amended the Provision on Decision-Making of the IQAA Accreditation Council (Minutes of the IQAA Accreditation Council Meeting № 7 from 9 December 2017), which states that the Accreditation Council has the right to adjust algorithm-based ratings in justified cases for institutional accreditation.

The detailed guidelines for external experts on determining the levels of compliance in peer reviews, which state requirements for all levels of compliance, are listed in the Digest of the Normative-Methodical Documents of the Agency (Astana 2016).

## ESG 2.6 REPORTING

### ENQA Recommendation

(1) Amend its regulations so that they state explicitly that accreditation review reports are published on its website regardless of the final outcome of a review; and (2) accordingly, publish all reports and related decisions of the Accreditation Council at least on its main website. IQAA may also consider the value of publishing summaries in English of all accreditation review reports, including those leading to conditional accreditation and non-accreditation, on its English-language website.

### **IQAA's implementation of the recommendation**

The Guidelines on the Organisation and Conduct of External Reviews for Institutional and Programme Accreditation were upgraded, and explicitly state that full reports of external reviews, regardless of the nature of decisions by the Accreditation Council, are published on the Agency's website.

All external review reports and decisions of the Accreditation Council are posted on the Agency's website.

While it would be a worthwhile task to publish all summary peer review reports in English on the website, the Agency currently doesn't have enough resources to implement it. However, the Agency aims to publish more summary reports in English on the website in the future.

## **14. SWOT-ANALYSIS**

### **Strengths**

- IQAA is an independent organisation that conducts accreditation procedures without interference from government agencies, higher educational organisations or other third parties.
- IQAA has a high professional reputation and maintains trust and respect among higher education institutions, as evidenced by the sufficient number of accreditation procedures carried out, including leading universities in Kazakhstan, despite a high number of accreditation agencies in Kazakhstan presently.
- IQAA has strong and stable relationships with all types of stakeholder groups, including student and employer associations that contribute to the improvement of quality assurance procedures.
- IQAA is a learning and flexible organisation, whose employees are dynamic and work on raising their professional competencies on a regular basis.
- Chairs and members of the Supervisory Board and Accreditation Council of IQAA are highly qualified and competent, and are reputed and authoritative experts in Kazakhstan.
- IQAA studies, practices and distributes European and international experience in the field of quality assurance in higher education by producing publishing bulletins on international higher education, and organising international conferences, workshops and forums on a regular basis.
- IQAA regularly conducts assessment procedures: surveys of national and international experts, students and employers, coordinators, and representatives of higher education institutions to receive feedback for continuous improvement of accreditation procedures.
- External review reports on institutional and programme accreditation of higher education institutions are available not only on the IQAA website, but also on the DEQAR database of EQAR.

### **Weaknesses**

- Financial dependence on the number of universities and educational programmes that are accredited.
- Irregular demand for a number of accreditation procedures per year within some groups of educational organisations (TVET institutions) due to changes in legislation on education.
- Lack of fluency in English among staff members of the Agency.

### **Opportunities**

- IQAA can use its experience to greater extent outside of Kazakhstan and other areas of the country's education system.

- Expansion of the database of international experts involved in quality assurance procedures of the Agency.
- Increasing cooperation with European, regional and international accreditation agencies.

### **Threats**

- Lack of stability in the legislative framework of quality assurance due to frequent changes in rules and regulations.
- A high number of accreditation agencies and relatively unscrupulous competition in the field of quality assurance.
- Frequent optimisation (merger) of higher education institutions in Kazakhstan generates some level of uncertainty in quality assurance procedures within the national higher education system.

## **15. CURRENT CHALLENGES AND AREAS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT**

### **Challenges**

There have been challenges in activities of the Agency due to the pandemic. IQAA has developed new methods for conducting external reviews in hybrid and remote formats, which have been presented at the INQAAHE International Forum, ENQA webinar, and Eurasian Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2020. Even in difficult conditions, the Agency strives to conduct external audits in a hybrid format to ensure proper quality of assessments. In the future, when the pandemic ends, the Agency plans to resume operating in a standard mode. However, the Agency plans to maintain the use of hybrid audits in certain cases, as they have proven their worth and benefits in practice.

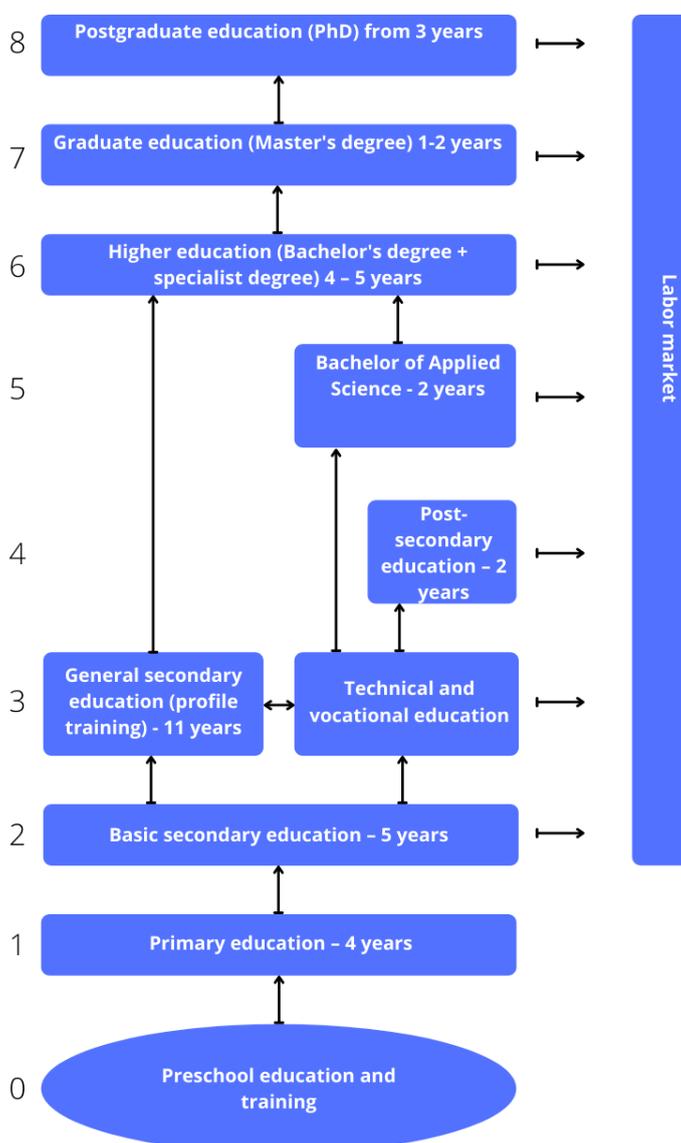
### **Directions for future development:**

- Further improvement of the standards and processes, with the involvement of stakeholder groups, to improve the Agency's performance, taking into account changing circumstances.
- Maintaining high quality of accreditation procedures as the means of increasing competitiveness and maintaining trust of higher education institutions.
- Improvement of the performance based on the principles of a learning organisation with professional and highly qualified employees.
- Broad analysis and use of best international experience, including the information support provided by ENQA, EQAR and other international networks, and expanding cooperation with foreign accreditation agencies.
- Expansion of the geography of higher educational organisations in the context of cross-border accreditation.

### Structure of the education system in Kazakhstan

The education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan is characterized by multilevel and continuous development and includes the following levels of education:

0. Preschool education and training – 1/6 years.
1. Primary education (4 years); entry – 6/7 years.
2. Basic secondary education; entry – 10/11 years.
3. Secondary education:
  - general secondary education, entry – 15/16 years;
  - technical and professional education: qualifications of a worker and a mid-level specialist, entry – 15/16 years.
4. Post-secondary education: qualifications of a worker with a high level of rank; entry – 17/18 years.
5. Incomplete higher education – applied bachelor's degree; admission – 17/18 years.
6. Higher education: bachelor's degree, specialist (bachelor) qualifications for medical specialties; admission – 17/18 years.
- 7-8. Postgraduate higher education: Master's and PhD degrees.



## National Qualifications Framework in Kazakhstan

### 1. General provisions

1. National Qualifications Framework (NQF) contains eight levels of qualifications, which correspond to the European Framework of Qualifications and the levels of education defined by the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan from 27 July 2007 “On Education”. The eight recommended levels are described in terms of learning outcomes.

2. Learning outcomes fall into three categories: knowledge, abilities and competence. They indicate that qualifications in various combinations represent the entire spectrum of educational outcomes, including theoretical knowledge, practical and technical skills, as well as social competence, for which the ability to cooperate with others is crucial.

3. The National Qualifications Framework defines a unified scale of qualification levels for general professional competencies for the development of sectoral qualifications frameworks and professional standards. Thus, the NQF ensures cross-sectoral comparability of qualifications and competencies, and is the basis for the system of the confirmation of conformity and the awarding of specialists’ qualifications.

The National Qualifications Framework provides a structural description of the requirements for personal and professional competencies, for skills and abilities, for knowledge, their description is carried out within the sectoral framework of qualifications and professional standards.

4. The National Qualifications Framework is intended for various groups of users (government agencies and structures, employers, educational organisations, citizens) and allows to:

- 1) develop professional standards, educational standards and educational programmes on a unified methodological basis;
- 2) describe the requirements for learning outcomes, qualifications and competencies of specialists and graduates of educational organisations from a unified standpoint;
- 3) develop assessment materials and procedures for determining the qualifications of graduates at all levels of professional education.

5. Basic terms and concepts used in the present National Qualifications Framework:

- 1) qualification – official recognition of the value of acquired competencies for the labor market and further education and training, which gives the right to work;
- 2) qualification level – generalised requirements for the knowledge, skills and broad competencies of employees, differentiated by the parameters of complexity, non-standard labor actions, responsibility and independence;
- 3) professional competence – the readiness and ability to act expediently in accordance with the requirements of the labor sphere, to methodically and independently solve tasks and problems, as well as self-assess the results of own activities.
- 4) knowledge – information and norms used in individual and professional activities;
- 5) capabilities – actions controlled by the employee that meet the requirements of the standards of activity;
- 6) skills – actions beyond the control of the employee that meet the requirements of the standards of activity;
- 7) type of labor activity – a part of the field of professional activity, formed by an integral set of labor functions and the competencies necessary for their implementation;
- 8) labor function – an integral part of the type of labor activity, which is an integrated and relatively autonomous set of labor actions determined by the business process and assuming the presence of the necessary competencies to perform them;
- 9) professional task – a normative concept of actions related to the implementation of the

labor function and the achievement of the required result in a certain area of professional activity;

10) professional standard – a standard that defines the requirements for the level of qualifications and competence, for the content, quality and working conditions in a specific area of professional activity;

11) profession – the main occupation of a person's labor activity, requiring certain knowledge, capabilities and practical skills acquired as a result of special training and confirmed by the relevant educational documents;

12) competence – the ability of an employee to apply knowledge, skills and abilities in professional activity;

13) industry qualifications framework – a structured description of the skill levels recognised by the industry;

14) National Qualifications Framework – a structured description of the skill levels recognised in the labor market;

15) functional map – a structured description of labor functions and professional tasks performed by an employee of a certain type of labor activity within a particular area of professional activity;

16) established level of qualification – qualified workers who master the profession and practical skills necessary to perform simple tasks in a certain area of practical activity (the possibility of obtaining an accelerated form of training, professional training);

17) advanced level of qualification – qualified workers who master complex (related) professions and practical skills to perform work in all sectors of the economy associated with high technologies and professional activities (based on basic secondary and (or) general secondary education in schools, colleges and higher colleges);

18) mid-level specialist – a qualification awarded to individuals who have mastered integrated educational programmes of technical and vocational education, that provides the opportunity to carry out certain duties of the performer, and also include planning and organising the work performed (on the basis of basic secondary and (or) general secondary education in schools, colleges and higher colleges);

19) applied bachelor – a qualification awarded to individuals who have mastered educational programmes of post-secondary education;

20) bachelor's degree – higher education, which programmes are aimed at training personnel with the award of a "bachelor's" degree in the relevant specialty;

21) master's degree – postgraduate education, which programmes are aimed at training personnel with the award of a Master's degree in the relevant specialty;

22) doctoral studies – postgraduate education, which programmes are aimed at training personnel for scientific, pedagogical and (or) professional activities, with the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), doctor by profile;

23) practical work experience – determined by the work experience in the specialty for at least three of the last five years as a specialist in the relevant branch of the economy (field of activity).

## **2. The structure of the present NQF**

6. The NQF is a framework structure, designed in terms of the structure and ways of achieving the level of qualifications related to training, education, practical work experience, that are provided in the appendix to the NQF.

7. The principles of continuity, succession and consistent increase in requirements for learning outcomes based on competencies were used (from the first to the eighth qualification level) in development of the NQF;

Competence is an integrated concept that expresses a person's ability to independently apply various elements of knowledge and skills in a certain context.

8. Personal and professional competencies, abilities, skills and knowledge of the employee

determine the level of quality and results of the activities performed.

Employees have a different level of authority and responsibility depending on their position in the system of professional activity. The activities of employees are carried out under supervision, independently (performing activities) or involves the management of the activities of other employees.

Competencies refer to generalised characteristics of employee behavior. Capabilities, skills and knowledge refer to private characteristics that concretise the key competencies of the employee, and are used in certain life situations, allowing to solve various tasks in the professional or social sphere.

The basis of professional activity is composed of the personal and professional competences of the employee, which determine his/her adaptation to the changing situation in society and the labor market, updating existing or forming new competencies.

9. Qualifications and competencies are the result of a person's mastering a certain educational programme and (or) acquiring professional practical experience. To improve the qualifications or change the profile of their activity (profession), employees have the opportunity to undergo training in additional educational programmes at various educational organisations. Upon graduation from educational organisations, retraining or advanced training courses, employees undergo practical testing of their professional level in independent centres for the confirmation and award of qualifications.

## National Qualifications Framework in Kazakhstan

Levels	Knowledge	Capabilities and skills	Personal and professional competencies	Ways of achievement
1	Elementary basic knowledge about the surrounding world. Understanding simple connections between phenomena	Performing elementary tasks according to a well-known pattern	Activities under direct control	Initial education and practical experience and/or short-term on-the-job training (coaching) and/or short courses
2	Basic fundamental knowledge, professional guidance	Execution of tasks according to a given algorithm of actions and its correction in accordance with working conditions	Guided activities with a specific degree of autonomy	Basic secondary education and practical experience and/or professional training (short-term courses on the basis of an educational organisation or on-site training, the established level)
3	Basic, general education and practice-oriented knowledge in the professional field	Solving typical professional tasks in standard conditions	Activities with a certain degree of independence based on the task	Basic secondary education and technical and vocational education (advanced level) or general secondary education and practical experience and/or professional training (courses on the basis of an educational organisation for vocational training programmes up to one year or on-site training)

4	Professional (theoretical and practical) knowledge and experience	Solving typical professional tasks of a wide range in predictable conditions that require an independent analysis of the educational and work situations, their possible changes and consequences	Leading the routine work of others, taking into account significant social and ethical considerations; Responsibility for self-study and the training of others	General secondary education and technical and vocational education (mid-level specialist); General secondary education and practical experience
5	A wide range of theoretical and practical knowledge in the professional field	Independent development and promotion of various options for solving professional problems using theoretical and practical knowledge	Independent management and control of work and study processes within the framework of strategy, policy and goals of the organisation, discussion of problems, reasoning of conclusions and competent handling of information	Post-secondary education (applied bachelor's degree), practical experience; at least two years of undergraduate studies or three years of mastering special higher education programmes, practical experience
6	A wide range of theoretical and practical knowledge in the professional field	Independent development and promotion of various options for solving professional problems using theoretical and practical knowledge	Independent management and control of work and study processes within the framework of strategy, policy and goals of the organisation, discussion of problems, reasoning of conclusions and competent handling of information	Higher education. Bachelor's, Specialist degree, Residency and Practical Experience

7	Conceptual knowledge in the field of science and professional activity; Creation of new applied knowledge in the professional field	Independent determination of the goal of professional activity and the choice of adequate methods and means of achieving them. Implementation of scientific, innovative activities to obtain new knowledge	Determination of the strategy, activities of a unit or organisation; Decision-making and accountability at the departmental level	Master's degree and/or practical experience
8	Methodological knowledge in the field of innovative and professional activities	Generation of ideas, forecasting the results of innovative activities, implementation of large-scale changes in the professional and social sphere, management of complex production and scientific processes	Definition of strategy, management of processes and activities, decision-making and accountability at the level of institutional structures; Ability for leadership, autonomy, analysis, assessment and implementation of complex innovative ideas in scientific and practical fields; Competent communication in a specific field of scientific and professional activity.	PhD studies, academic degree of the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), degree of the Doctor by profile, Candidate of Science, Doctor of Science or higher professional education and practical experience in the specialty, or managerial work experience

## Appendix 3

### List of select professional development activities for IQAA employees (2017-2021)

№	Name	Date
1	<p>Seminar for university managers and representatives on "The structure of quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)". Speaker: Colin Tück, Director of the Secretariat of the European Quality Assurance Register in Higher Education (EQAR).</p> <p>The following topics were discussed during the seminar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ESG 2015 major changes;</li> <li>- The role of EQAR in the European Higher Education Area;</li> <li>- External quality assurance across borders;</li> <li>- Ensuring the quality of joint educational programmes.</li> </ul>	2 March 2017
2	<p>Discussion of standards and criteria for institutional and specialised (programme) accreditation. More than 40 participants took part in the discussion: rectors, vice-rectors and representatives of higher educational institutions responsible for the quality assurance procedure, representatives of research institutes responsible for postgraduate training of residents, as well as chairs of IQAA accreditation committees.</p>	30 June 2017
3	<p>Information seminar between the rectors of Polish universities, the Educational Foundation "Prospects" in cooperation with the Embassy of Poland and IQAA to expand and deepen the academic mobility of students and faculty, to create joint educational programmes with Polish universities.</p>	8 September 2017
4	<p>International training seminar on "Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Evaluation: Principles and Technologies" with the participation of international experts from Europe, associate professors of the Nazarbayev University and representatives of the Almaty Management University.</p>	5 October 2017
5	<p>Master class on the topic: "Competence-Based Curriculum Development, Student-Centred Teaching, and Quality Assurance".</p>	6 October 2017
6	<p>Participation of employees of the Department of Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in the training seminar "Educational activities of universities in the context of expanding academic and managerial independence" at the Nazarbayev University</p>	22-23 November 2018
7	<p>Participation of IQAA representatives in the VIII Eurasian Forum of Higher Education Leaders "Graduates ready for the future"</p>	6-7 June 2019

8	Training seminar for Agency employees on the topic "Cloud technologies", prepared by employees of the Database and IT Department of IQAA	4 July 2019
9	Participation of IQAA representatives in the Information and Analytical Centre of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan meeting with OECD experts in order to prepare a country review on the policy of assessing the quality of education in Kazakhstan	8 November 2019
10	Participation of IQAA representatives in the webinar "How to prepare a good self-assessment report for the ENQA Agency Review – the value of the process for agency development " organised by ENQA	4 December 2019
11	Training seminar "Experience and practice of foreign quality assurance agencies", IQAA's Department of Analysis and Quality	8 September 2020
12	Seminar for the Agency employees "External evaluation of ENQA 2021: Preparation plan and set of documents", IQAA's Department of Analysis and Quality	13 November 2020
13	Training seminar "Solutions and technologies for remote work", IQAA's Database and IT Department	20 November 2020
14	Training seminar "Analysis of reviewing and proofreading of external review panel reports", IQAA's Department of Reviewing Reports and Post-Accreditation Monitoring	25 November 2020
15	Training seminar for IQAA employees "Criteria for updating the expert database in the framework of new audit formats", Department of Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions	04 December 2020

**List of select IQAA staff exchange and capacity building activities (2017-2021)**

№	Name	Date
1	National seminar on quality assurance and accreditation in higher education and technical vocational education within the framework of the Central Asian Education Platform project in Astana	25 May 2017
2	Session on sharing the experience of the Nazarbayev University "Processes for institutional improvement and ensuring academic quality" within the framework of the VI Eurasian Forum of Higher Education Leaders in Astana	1 June 2017
3	Seminar organised by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia in the Latvian Pavilion: "Energy – in our nature" at the International Specialised Exhibition “The Future of Energy” (EXPO 2017) in Astana	21 June 2017
4	Participation in a webinar organised by the CHEA International Quality Group (CIQG) on the topic: “Quality assurance and combating academic corruption: focus on plagiarism”	10 July 2017
5	Participation of IQAA representatives in the seminar held in Astana within the framework of the Days of Finnish Education at the International Specialised Exhibition EXPO 2017 “Global Teacher Education”	25 August 2017
6	Holding a seminar at the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs “Atameken” on the topic “Rankings as an effective tool for assessing the quality of universities”	27 September 2017
7	Participation of IQAA representatives in a workshop for agencies that have recently passed an external assessment of ENQA at the Dutch Agency NVAO in the Hague (The Netherlands)	12-13 October 2017
8	Participation of IQAA representatives in the UNESCO Regional Consultation Meeting for Western Europe in cooperation with the Swiss Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Geneva, Switzerland	15-16 February 2018
9	Participation of IQAA employees in the international training seminar “Management of the Internal Quality Assurance System in Higher Education” with the participation of international experts	6 April 2018
10	Participation of IQAA representatives in the UNESCO Regional Meeting for Eastern Europe and Central Asia “The Role of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Achievements, Challenges and Prospects”, Moscow (Russia)	23-24 April 2018
11	Participation of IQAA representatives in the training seminar “Development of external and internal quality assurance tools”, Lyon (France)	30-31 May 2018
12	Participation of IQAA representatives in the VII Eurasian Forum of Higher Education Leaders "Innovation of Higher Education in the Era of Breakthrough Technologies" at the Nazarbayev University, Astana (Kazakhstan)	7-8 June 2018

13	Piloting the standards and criteria for specialised accreditation of doctoral programmes in the framework of the Erasmus+ project “Promoting the internationalisation of research through the establishment and operation of the third cycle quality assurance system in accordance with the European Integration Agenda (C3QA)”	10-11 March 2019 13-14 March 2019
14	International conference of experts on quality assessment in education organised by IQAA at the Kazakh National University of Arts	27 May 2019
15	The Second Eurasian Forum on Quality Assurance in Higher Education “Transformation through Digitalisation: Universities and Quality Assurance”	16 September 2019
16	Kick-off webinar for quality assurance agencies as part of the DEQAR CONNECT project	11 May 2020
17	International Forum by INQAAHE on “Quality, Competencies and Learning Outcomes: Preparing for Generation Z Employment”	28 September-1 October 2020
18	III Eurasian Forum on Quality Assurance in Higher Education “Distance Education in the context of a pandemic: Teaching, learning and evaluation”	16 October 2020
19	International Online Forum "Global in Regional: Kazakhstan in the Bologna Process and EU Projects"	20-21 October 2020
20	Participation of IQAA representatives in the XVII Republican Meeting of the Alliance of Students of Kazakhstan and the II Republican Meeting of the Committee on Youth Affairs	6 November 2020
21	Training seminar on the organisation of external evaluation for IQAA employees	5 February 2021
22	Meeting of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan on improving the quality of education in Kazakh universities at the KazGUU University	22 February 2021
23	Training seminar "The role of expert representatives of employers in external quality assurance" by IQAA	14 April 2021

### **The list of IQAA new and updated documents with amendments and additions (2017-2021)**

- Instructions for coordinators on the organisation and conduct of external reviews in the frames of institutional and programmatic accreditation;
- Webinar regulations;
- Regulations on the Supervisory Board.
- Regulations on Post-Accreditation Monitoring;
- Regulations on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning institutional accreditation of higher education institutions;
- Regulations on decision-making by the IQAA Accreditation Council on Institutional Accreditation of Higher Education Organisations (according to the updated IQAA standards);
- Regulations on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning programme accreditation of higher education institutions;
- Regulations on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning programme accreditation of higher education institutions (PhD and by profile);
- Regulations on the Complaint Procedure;
- Regulations on the Accreditation Council;
- Regulations on Accreditation Committees;
- Regulations on the Appeal Commission and the Appeal Procedure;
- Rules for the selection of experts for the external review of IQAA;
- Guidelines for the organisation and conduct of hybrid and distant external reviews (audits) in the frames of institutional and programme accreditation;
- Guidelines for the organisation and conduct of self-assessment procedures of educational programmes at doctoral level;
- Standards and criteria for internal quality assurance of doctoral programmes;
- Standards and criteria for accreditation of third cycle (doctoral studies) educational programmes;
- Standards of institutional accreditation;
- Guidelines for the preparation of self-assessment reports of educational institutions for programme accreditation;
- Guidelines for the preparation of self-assessment reports of educational institutions for institutional accreditation;
- Requirements for technical design of the self-assessment reports of educational institutions;
- Requirements for technical design of the self-assessment reports of educational programmes.



IQAA

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